“Born with the Caul”: A fictocritical revisiting of race-d and queer(ed) his/stories

Chantelle Claire Croeser

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Supervisors: Dr. Nadia Sanger and Prof. Sally-Ann Murray

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Using fictocriticism, a mode that b(l)ends creative and critical writing, in this thesis I am led on a winding journey in which I explore elusive, intersectional accounts of various kinds of queer and Queer belonging. These are stories from the margins, and they coax me to engage the unsettled relations of my own white, Queer, Afrikaner identities. In so doing I come face-to-face with personal and cultural ghosts, who emerge from disparate clusters of history, story, interview, verse, folk tale, song lyrics, and scholarship. Divided (and yet assembled) into various entries, the thesis begins by contending with the haunting loss of much of my original interview archive with Queer womxn, conducted for a previous project, material I had intended to consider again, more critically, in respect of my own conflicted autoethnographic role in the interview process. For the present study, my point of departure in addressing this now missing archive takes a specific focus on an Afrikaans folk tale known as "The Curse of Boontjieskraal" and "The Curse of the De Wets". I inventively (re)write and (re)read this material and the speculated aftermath of the curse as a queer story, and thinking around about (B)orderlands, queerness, hospitality, Afrikaner identity, and my growing awareness of the necessarily incomplete archive, I consider what this story can tell us about the politics of inclusion and exclusion, presence and absence. Here, I also write toward expanding the term 'queer' beyond the umbrella term for the LGBTQIAP+ community and therefore use 'Queer' to signify the LGBTQIAP+ community and 'queer' to signify the expanded term. The second path I follow traces the spiritual powers of being *gebore met die helm*, meaning 'born with a caul'. Using Achmat Dangor's short story 'Waiting for Leila' (2001) and Chris Barnard's film *Paljas* (1998), I delve into the queer abilities of caul bearers as receptive to haunting and boundary-blurring. Seeking the experience of haunting as a means of meeting *my* ghosts, I use folklore as a means to consider what it might look like to retrieve the insight of my *helm* via the narrative power of queer Afrikaner stories. The final path is one I take with Antjie Somers, a Queer, stigmatised, witch-like figure well-known among Afrikaans people. By bringing permutations of their story into conversation with writing about outcasts like witches and Queer people, I consider the parallels that might be drawn between the experiences and knowledge of such ostracised, unconventional figures. I also consider how Antjie's story and the story of other queer figures might be able to guide us in the present toward a powerfully recuperative language of storytelling.

OPSOMMING

Deur middel van fiktokritiek, ’n skryfwyse wat kreatiwe en kritiese skryfwerk buig en vermeng, word ek in dié tesis op ’n kronkelpad pad gelei waarop ek ontwykende interseksionele verhale oor verskeie gevoelens van queer- en Queer-behoort verken. Hierdie is verhale vanuit die kantlyne wat my aanmoedig om die (soms) ontwrigte(nde) verhoudings van my eie wit Queer Afrikaneridentiteite te ondersoek. Sodoende kom ek van aangesig tot aangesig met persoonlike en kulturele spoke wat vanuit uiteenlopendede klusters van geskiedenis, verhaal, onderhoud, vers, volksverhaal, lirieke, en akademiese werke verskyn. Die tesis, verdeel in (en tog ook saamgestel uit) verskeie inskrywings en toegangspunte, begin deur te besin oor die spookagtige verlies van groot gedeeltes van my oorspronlike onderhouds argief met Queer vroue. Dié onderhoude is gevoer vir ’n vorige projek en die materiaal wat ek van plan was om krities te herondersoek, veral ten opsigte van my my eie teenstrydige outoetnografiese rol in onderhoudsvoering proses. Die uitgangspunt van waar ek vertrek om dié nou vermiste argief aan te spreek, in verband met die huidige studie, neem ’n spesifieke fokus op ’n Afrikaans volksverhaal geken as “Die Vloek van Boontjieskraal” of “Die Vloek van die de Wets”. Op `n vindigryke wyse (her)lees en (her)skryf ek die verhaal en die bespiegelde nadraaie van die vloek as ’n queer verhaal. Deur (na) te dink oor grense, queerheid, gasvryheid, Afrikaneridentititeit, en my groeiende bewustheid oor die noodwendige onvolledigheid van die argief, oorweeg ek wat die verhaal oor die politiek van insluiting en uitsluiting, teenwoordigheid en afwesigheid kan onthul. Hier skryf ek ook vir die uitbreiding van die term ‘queer’ as meer as slegs ’n sambreel term vir die LGBTQIAP+ gemeenskap. Ek gebruik dus ‘Queer’ in verwysing na die LGBTQIAP+ gemeenskap en ‘queer’ in verwysing na die uitgebreide term. Die tweede pad wat ek volg ondersoek die geestelike kragte van ‘met die helm gebore’ wees. Deur gebruik te maak van Achmat Dangor se kortverhaal ‘Waiting for Leila’ (2001) en Chris Barnard se film *Paljas* (1998), delf ek in die vermoëns wat helmdraers het om meer ontvanklik te wees vir spookervaringe en grens-vervaging. Op soek spookervaringe ten einde my eie geeste in die oë te kyk, gebruik ek volksverhaal as ’n middel om te oorweeg hoe dit sal lyk om die insig van die helm op te (ver)haal deur die vertelkrag van queer Afrikanerverhale. Die laaste pad is een wat ek volg saam met Antjie Somers, ’n Queer, gestigmatiseerde, heksagtige figuur wel-bekend deur Afrikaanse mense. Deur permutasies van hulle verhaal in gesprek te bring met skrywe oor ander uitgeworpenes, soos hekse en Queer mense, oorweeg ek die parallelle wat getrek kan word met en tussen die ervaringe en kennis van sulke verstote, onkonvensionele figure. Ek oorweeg ook hoe Antjie se storie en die storie van ander queer figure vir ons in die hede kan lei na ’n kragtig herstellende taal van storievertelling.

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Reading Map

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A.

> *What I resent most, however, is not his inheritance of a power he so often disclaims, disengaging himself from a system he carries with him, but his ear, eye, and pen, which record in his language while pretending to speak through mine, on my behalf* (Minh-ha, 1989:48).

(Pre)ambling:

I'm sitting with a cup of coffee and a cigarette on a grey garden chair. Its pitch dark with only the glow of my computer screen casting its blue light. I've (tried to) start(ed) explaining this project to you nearly four or five times.

"The practice of writing is…" No, wait, that's not right.

"This project started…" Far too dry.

And so on and so forth. But I keep interrupting myself because somewhere, lingering in my mind, is a fast fading memory of the perfect opening line that had dawned on me the night before. Seduced by the warmth and comfort of my covers, I fooled myself into thinking that I would remember it in the morning, and that there was no need to write it down. I remember wanting to tell you a few reasons why I started this project, the first of which was the frustration I had with my writing project that preceded this one. In 2016, I conducted a study about the experiences of black and white Queer[1] womxn*[1] in Stellenbosch to unearth some of the silences that exist around race-d and gendered Queerness. The project was close to my heart since I was writing about my own community of Queer womxn, and the town in which I live and work. Throughout the research process, I read about the lives of Queer humxns. It was refreshing to see that at long last my community was being written about, but an uneasy feeling irked me. Why are Queer humxns only written as humxns who are constantly in the grips of an oppressive struggle? Very little writing shows the nuance of being Queer, and that Queer humxns exist as people who experience both hardship and joy. After the study was done and dusted, I was still uneasy and restless, constantly bothered by the feeling that the project was not finished and that my writing had not done justice to the womxn I wrote about. I soon realised that I had committed the very crime that had frustrated me so much throughout my research. Another

[1] I will use "Queer" (with a capital Q) as an umbrella term to refer to the LGBTQIAP+ community. I capitalise Queer to distinguish it from "queer" which I will use to refer more broadly to so-called deviance from a range of social norms. For a more detailed explanation of my use of "queer" refer to **Notes on queerness and the archive.**

***1 Womxn**

In its original spelling, the word 'woman' (plural 'women') originates from the Old English *wimman* or *wiman*, which is an alteration of the word *wifman* (female servant). *Wifman* is in turn a compound of the words *wif*, which means female (notice the disturbing relation between wife and *wif*), and *man*, which means human-being (notice the disturbing implication in the English language that only men are human-beings). Thus 'woman' is derived from words that denote both servitude and denotes the female as a mere subset to man or more literally 'female man'(Harper, 2018). What is clear from the lineage of the meaning of the word 'woman' is that it seeks to erase the experience being a womxn in the world and reduce our existence to being servants and subsets to men. It also suggests that it is only when the womxn is attached to a man that she is regarded as closer to being a 'human-being'. Indeed, "through his words, through his values, through his actions, [phallocrats] interpret her out of existence" (Tirrell, 1993:9). While the womxn is often still seen as a mere subset to men and, seduced by the false protection patriarchy offers, may even regard herself as such, "our knowledge of ourselves under oppression is often knowledge of a mystified reality, perhaps knowledge of who we have become, but not always knowledge of who we can be" (Tirrell, 1993:6). Thus it seems possible to break free from the bonding and bounded definitions that patriarchy have imposed upon us, to bend and twist these definitions and turn them in on themselves. But what might this look like? In her *Definition and Power: Toward Authority without Privilege*, Lynne Tirrell (1993:2) calls for feminists to "question the authority of men to write (or erase) women's lives, literally and metaphorically," and "take the kind of authority to name, describe, and create our world that many men have had for a long time". She calls this the reclaiming of our "semantic authority" (Tirrell, 1993: 6). Seeking such semantic authority is "to engage in the practice of naming, describing and re-creating ourselves and our world" (Tirrell, 1993:6). It is a matter of reclaiming "the power to articulate our own experiences in our own terms [and] to develop a conceptual scheme that can encompass many of the experiential dissonances with which we struggle daily" (Tirrell, 1993:25). Audre Lorde (1984:121) calls this the struggle against "the restrictions of externally imposed definition". Similarly, bell hooks (1994: 175) writes about this need to make bend, break, and shift language to better describe our particular experiences: "to heal the splitting of mind and body…we make English do what we want it to do".

One of the ways in which feminists have taken up this call is by rethinking the spelling of the word 'woman' so as to re-imagine the womxn as something more than a mere subset to the man. The first move toward this rethinking resulted in the term 'womyn'. However, this term was soon jettisoned by some feminists since it had become largely associated with white trans-erasing radical feminist groups that wish to exclude transgender womxn from the term 'womyn' since they do not view transgender womxn as womxn. The need to revise the term 'womyn' and thus (re)invent language in a way that is inclusive led to the transgressive spelling of womxn where an 'x' replaces the 'a' and 'e' of 'woman' and 'women' and the 'y' of 'womyn'. Similarly, I take up this call by using the spelling 'womxn'. (The story that lives and breaths the x into being is a story that is too long to recount, retell, and explore here, but it is a story worth exploring elsewhere.)

As an intersectional feminist writer, it is not enough that I write to destabilise, challenge and question oppressive systems through what I write about, but I also write using language imagined by womxn, as an alternative to patriarchal language. This is thus simultaneously an action toward deconstructing the contexts in which womxn are oppressed while using a language that is self articulated and deconstructs the oppressive elements of language since "for an agent in an oppressive context, the project of self-articulation cannot be divorced from defining and deconstructing that context" (Tirrell, 1993:5) in which we are oppressed.

frustration looked over my shoulder: Had I written myself into the text? Had I really considered myself, and my own identity in interviewing and writing about these womxn? As a white Queer Afrikaans womxn interviewing white and black Queer womxn, I had to stand in front of the mirror and identify myself as being:

white

+

Afrikaans

+

able bodied

+

Queer

+

womxn

+

writer

and for that moment also,

listener

I aimed to understand the experiences of the womxn I interviewed by understanding myself as both oppressor and oppressed, resilient and traumatised. I hoped to unpack the ways in which

I shared in their trauma as a Queer womxn, but how my sharing in their trauma (as well as the sharing of their enactment of trauma) was influenced by my whiteness, and how my own trauma was different to that of the Queer womxn of colour I interviewed because of my whiteness. And yet reflecting on these moments revealed the revolutionary act of shared resilience, of potentially reclaiming our lives as meaningful. Whatever the limits of my earlier project, it led towards new possibilities, and I envisaged that the radical nature of something (that seems) as simple as asserting our voice and claiming space, might also enable a rejoicing in the meeting and border-crossing of intersecting identities.

Of course, I didn't remember that perfect opening line I wanted to start with and I still don't. The starting point which I will therefore offer you is a hopeful attempt at rephrasing and piecing together my (vague) memory of this perfect opening line. Then again, writing (for me at least) always seems to (be) birth(ed) from (a) frustration (with) or (a) celebration (of something). The act of writing is almost always the act of re-writing or re-phrasing knowledge and ideas that already exist in the hopes that *this* reconfiguring, *this* arrangement of knowledge, could illuminate something new about the human condition. After all, writing is an attempt to use language to mediate the ideas that the writer takes from their stream of consciousness. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989:23) echoes this in saying that "writers usually [write] to create a world of their own, make order out of chaos, heighten their awareness of life, transcend their existences, discover themselves, communicate their feelings, or speak to others". Writing then requires the writer to write with the text, to become as the text becomes, and not to write themselves as existing before, after or above the text. That the mother of writing is usually frustration and/or celebration should be obvious. Writing is a celebration of the ways in which we can bend language to express our thoughts. Simultaneously, writing is only ever an *attempt* to capture our thoughts and therefore exposes the frustrating inability of language (and writing) to capture our thoughts and ideas *as they are*. Indeed, "even if art is said to be a 'window on the world, it is only 'a sketched window'"(V. Shklovsky cited in Minh-ha, 1989:23). Writing is the act of gesturing toward, and reaching out in an attempt to capture what is often unsayable, unseeable, what cannot be heard (turn to **Met die Helm Gebore** for more on this). As such, writing not only (hopes to) describe(s) the writer's inner-world, but (re)creates that inner-world for the reader (and writer).

Writers, and any users of language, are however shackled by the linearity of language that suggests a beginning, a middle and an end, and can only articulate their inner-world through

this linearity because just as "sketched windows have their own realities, writing as a system by itself has its own rules and structuring process" (Minh-ha, 1989:23). This linearity is further reinforced, especially in academic writing, by the didactic nature in which we have been trained to write. This didacticism conditions the writer to write their idea with a beginning, a middle and an end, explaining the writer's idea as something with a precise beginning, a series of premises following on from one another, and a conclusion. Instead, I am interested in bending language, in sentences that only suggest an end, that are left incomplete. I am interested not in the orderly syntax of complete sentences, but rather in how the words in sentences exist in relation to other words, even as they attempt to fix meaning *here* and not *there.* The *other* meanings a word suggests, gestures toward, imply, how words and sentences can be freed from linearity and instead be woven as a threads in a web, a tapestry. Like Minh-ha (1989:24)

> I see no interest in adopting a progression that systematically proceeds from generalities to specificities, from outlines to fillings, from diachronic to synchronic, or vice versa. And I am profoundly indifferent to his old way of theorizing-of piercing, as he often claims, through the sediments of psychological and epistemological 'depths'.

Our thoughts and ideas do not progress systematically moving from generalities to specificities but are instead like a mesh, a tapestry, a web, a mirrored mosaic. Virginia Woolfe's (1987) *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* attempts to demonstrate this mesh-like nature and surreal simultaneity of a person's inner-world:

> But what could be more absurd? It is, in fact, on the stroke of six; it is a winter's evening; we are walking to The Strand to buy a pencil. How, then, are we also on a balcony, wearing pearls in June? What could be more absurd? Yet it is nature's folly, not ours. When she set out her chief masterpiece, the making of man, she should have thought of only one thing. Instead, turning her head, looking over her shoulder, into each of us she let creep instincts and desires which are utterly at variance with his main being, so that we are streaked, variegated, all of a mixture; the colours have run. Is it the true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June? Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves?

Writing (and language) alone, bound by linearity, is therefore always unable to articulate this meshwork, this multiplicity of the self. Minh-ha (1989:24) points to how "writing reflects. It reflects on other writings and, whenever awareness emerges, on itself as writing. Like the Japanese boxes that contain other boxes, nest one inside the other *ad nihilum*, writing is meshing one's writing with the machinery of endless reflexivity". What the writer hopes to do is glue together a mosaic of mirrors, reflecting themselves, in which a (broken) image of the reader refracts with the light (turn to **Sp(i)eel (bietjie saam met my) or, mirror mirror on the wall** to look in one such mirror).

Wedded to this inherent inability of language and writing to articulate entanglement, is what readers bring to a text. Barthes (1977:148) suggests that

> there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination.

This suggests that texts do not exist as one singular unity, one entity, but that they take on multiple forms of unity, a multiplicity of unity, even a multiplicitous unity, as they encounter multiple readers and the multiplicity within each reader (turn to **There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.** if you wish to fall through the cracks). The writer can therefore never truly determine the meaning of their own text. A text, once released into the world, grows, morphs, and takes on a new shape. It reflects, refracts and bends light, the colour of which the writer can never control. The writer may present their text as a finished idea but it is always open to readers and their (re)interpretation. This open-ness to (re)interpretation gestures toward the space that exists in-between words and in-between the writer and the reader, in-between the mirrors in the kaleidoscope's tube wherein the light refractions dance, a pattern that endlessly reflects. This space is the space in which the reader associates what they are reading with their own memories and ideas. Here, the reader attaches a personal understanding to what they are reading, and therefore makes meaning of it in a way that the writer could never even imagine. Readers read themselves into the text. How will the reader twist this kaleidoscope? How will the light refract if the tube is adjusted this way or that? What patterned picture will a reader see when they turn the text to reflect on itself?

In this complex deferral, Minh-ha (1989:49) also alerts us to the violence of trying to seek a singular meaning in (or attach a singular meaning to) a text, of analysing, interpreting and dissecting the patterns bouncing off the eye, or of answering why the colours bleed together the way they do (the humxn[2] and the humxn condition included here as a text)[3]:

> Seeking to perforate meaning by forcing my entry or breaking open to dissipate what is *thought* to be its secrets seems to me as crippled an act as verifying the sex of an unborn child by ripping open the mother's womb. It is typical of a mentality that proves incapable of touching the living thing without crushing its delicateness. (my emphasis)

Such forcing of an entry and breaking open of a text is to assume that a text has *one fixed* meaning, that each text holds some 'secret', and that the meaning *I* interpret is The Meaning, and that it should be held as Truer. As any number of thinkers would aver, this limits the text and its possibilities and potential, steals from other readers the joy of encountering the text as they would read it. What should instead be considered is a writing-in-the-presence-of other texts rather than a breaking open of text. Minh-ha (1989:49) states that she "undeniably prefer[s] the heterogeneity of free play in a dice game to the unity and uniformity of dissection, classification, and synthesis toward a higher truth". Barthes (1977) echoes her when he challenges us to bury the writer. With the writer in the coffin, Barthes (1977:147) therefore challenges us to bury meaning too:

> Writing ceaselessly posits meaning but always in order to evaporate it: it proceeds to a systematic exemption of meaning. Thus literature (it would be better, henceforth, to say writing), by refusing to assign to the text (and to the world as text) a "secret:' that is, an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity which we might call counter-theological, properly revolutionary.

In the writer's stead, the reader must be resurrected so as to liberate texts but this is not to override the *writer* completely. How might writers go about writing in anticipation of the liberated freedom of a reader's proliferation of meaning? What are ways in which we can write that acknowledge this energy. Perhaps, my own study suggests, the stitching together of foot-

[2] I apply the same practice of reclaiming semantic authority to the word 'human' by spelling it as 'humxn' as I do in the use of the word 'womxn'. (See **Womxn**.)

[3] Adrian Wilson (2012:346) suggests in his "What is a text?" that "a text is not a natural object; rather, textuality is a mode of apprehension, a practical construal". Thus rather than the attribute of being a text being inherent to any given subject or object, textuality is assigned to any object and/or subject. Such an object and/or subject is thus positioned in such a manner that allows for it to be read. The behaviours, characteristics, events, situations, pasts, presents of each humxn life and the humxn condition can thus be apprehended and construed as texts that can be read like a story.

notes, ideas in the margin, and a multiplicity of writing tactics and narratives could be productive? What does writing look like when it leaves space for the light to play and take on the multiple life-forms that the various reading/writing agents choose to give it? How do writers turn and re-turn such agency to readers? It is here that fictocriticism slips into the corner of my eye, into the corner of my consciousness, while I search for answers to my questions.

I look down on the red bricks
that map the sides of each Stellenbosch road,
veins coursing with bodies,
leading the bodies to
their destination.
In between each brick,
plants
reach out
for air.
Gardeners toil tirelessly to invisibilise these.
First, they trim. If this proves vain,
their picks unearth
the bricks
and uproot the growth
Sweat
drips
from their forehead
feeding the dry earth with their DNA,
the sun bounces off
of the sheen.
I don't know why these plants are so stubborn, but at the waxing
of each new moon
they reveal themselves
again,
stronger this time, more stubborn.
the roots lie deeper
than what we can reach,
the sweat nurtures them,

the persistence of the sweat droplets,
the persistence of the offering
breeds a persistence in them.
They cannot allow the feet that trample to forget what
lurks
underneath the surface.
They reach out to the sunlight, thirsting to bask in the light of day
If left to grow, will they re-envelope man's superimposition of red bricks,
Of shoed feet,
Of axe picks?
The moist soil resists,
even in the darkness

I was supposed to explain fictocriticism wasn't I?

If the red bricks were the writing that is seen and known to us, I suppose fictocriticism would be the plants: a mode of writing that aims to write the margins, the footnotes, the in-between. Fictocriticism articulates instances

> where poeticalness is not primarily an aesthetic response, nor literariness merely a question of pure verbalism. And instances where the borderline between theoretical and non-theoretical writings is blurred and questioned, so that theory and poetry necessarily mesh, both determined by an awareness of the sign and the destabilization of the meaning and writing subject. To be lost, to encounter impasse, to fall, and to desire both fall and impasse - isn't this what happens to the body in theory? (Minh-ha, 1989:42)

As a necessarily hybrid mode of writing, fictocriticism takes on qualities of fiction, *and* qualities of critical writing. Farrar (2008:6) writes of fictocriticism as "a series of readings and re-readings which establish a practice of critical fictionalising and the fictionalising of the critical" and as such, a fictocritical text "both interrupts the monolithic architecture of the text through the techniques of the cut and the stitch, and also, by 'reading between the lines' of the novel, provides alternative readings; a space for other voices, other texts." The cut and stitch that Farrar refers to here is one of many elements that attracted me to fictocriticism. Farrar (2008:9) writes that

> [for William Burroughs] the technique 'liberated' something fundamental about the writing process. [B]y cutting pages up and rearranging them, certain channels were opened up in the text. [W]hole new ideas emerged, which were later incorporated into the text. Even that, '[p]erhaps events are prewritten and pre-recorded and when you cut word lines the future leaks out'.

This liberation, this queer(y)ing of the writing process enables me to piece together what has already been written about queer humxns, writing about writing, writing about critical writing, fictional writing (my own and that of others), theory, and many other texts, to arrive at a new way of writing queer womxn, writing myself and writing us in all of our nuances. This method allows me to interrupt myself, and allows other texts to interrupt mine. Minh-ha (1989:44) writes that

> 'Writing the body' is that abstract-concrete, personal-political realm of excess not fully contained by writing's unifying structural forces. Its physicality (vocality, tactility, touch, resonance), or edging and margin, exceeds the rationalized 'clarity' of communicative structures and cannot be fully explained by any analysis.

Fictocriticism claims space for such excess and enables me to write what lies in between the utterances being listened to, to write the excess, to write what leaks from my own writing, what cannot be contained in my own writing, and to write (listen to) the survivor's utterance which is itself birthed from in-between trauma and healing, in-between the enactment of trauma and an active admitting to being an enactor of trauma, in-between being traumatized and being healed. This project consists of cutting and stitching together a multitude of texts and it revels in the excess that abounds in such a cutting and stitching.

The decision to write fictocriticically came as an afterthought to writing myself. The conditioned response to reporting on a study like the one I did in 2016 is to write phallocentrically (note the use of 'ally' in many adverbs. Is writing only ever an ally to speech, an ally to action?) by explaining the aim of the study, proceeding to form an argument based on the observations made in the study, highlighting key themes that became apparent in the study, and reaching a conclusion. In her "The Laugh of the Medusa", Cixous (1976:875) writes about the need for womxn to write themselves and bring themselves to writing, arguing that womxn must do so by putting herself in the text through her own movement. Phallocentric

writing, as a mode of writing created by men, seeks to centre the phallus[4] and restricts the possibility of this movement she refers to. Cixous (1976: 876) continues;

> I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire [referring to womxn's descriptions of their world] so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs… I, too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn't repaint my half of the world. I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear… Where is the ebullient, infinite woman who, immersed as she was in her naiveté, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism, hasn't been ashamed of her strength?

As such, phallocentrism hides womxn (and the stories that burst from them) and confines us to rooms, the walls of which are covered with mirrors, faced with reflections that phallocentrism has conditioned us only to read in the sanguine light of disdain. This disdain leaves a rusty after-taste in my mouth as I lick up the discharge leaking from my genitals onto the floor. How else must I hide it than by cleaning it with my tongue, in this room to which I have been isolated?

In re-reading my 2016 research report, for all its thoroughness and earnestness, it seemed unable to capture the trauma, and enactment of trauma that the Queer womxn narrated. The paper was unable to show our nuance and resilience, our joy and hardship. It hid myself and the womxn I interviewed as always only names on a page, participants in yet another study on the intersectional experience of humxns, and I could not bring them to life on paper in a way that was true to who they are. And what position did phallocentric writing place me in? No matter how much I tried to pretend that I partook in active reflection on my own identity and its influence on how I listened to what the womxn narrated to me (and how I made observations about their narratives) by writing in the (phallocentric) way we are conditioned to write, I would always occupy the space of the distanced 'third party'. Questions lingered unanswered around

[4] It is important to note here that in the original coining of the word 'phallocentric' by Ernest Jones (cited in Reithven, 1990:54), and even Lacan's (1997:285-288) linguistic turn of the phrase when he said that it is rather "the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signifier... this signifying function of the phallus", it referred to the phallus in biological terms. I do not, however, use it in biological terms since many transgender womxn retain their penises and are no less womxn than cisgendered womxn because of it. The phallus therefore refers to the symbolic phallic pen of the patriarchy that seeks to perforate and spread unified meaning like seeds; the phallic symbols that seek to enshrine and engender patriarchy, the phallus that forces its entry and promulgates the right to *know* and therefore speak as the out-sider and in-sider.

the paper I wrote, hovering just above the surface of the ink. Would a Queer (black or white) womxn understand the way in which I had written about her? I aimed to unearth silences around and about race-d and gendered Queerness in Stellenbosch, but can any silence truly be unearthed by using writing that never quite reaches out to the in-between? What worth was my writing to anyone if only a select few could access and understand it? (Turn to **Ek soek vergeefs na lank vermiste mense wat om my is maar onbereikbaar ver. In vain, I search for people who have been missing for too long, they are around me but too far to reach** if you wish to search with me.)

The layered trauma (and enactment of trauma) of these womxn entailed new wounds on top of old wounds, old wounds reopened with new lashes. It entails striations of inherited trauma and inherited ways of enacting trauma. What was my role in this; my intimacies and distances as a Queer Afrikaner womxn who was also a critical young scholar? What was my place in this; where did I belong? Warner argues:

> At the core of the struggle for home lies the struggle for the way the story of place is told. Between what is remembered and what is forgotten, the self takes its bearings home. The question is no longer who is to guard the guardians, of what, but who's to tell the story, what story? Who can bear witness? (quoted in Erasmus, 2001:98)

The role of listener becomes central to the healing of trauma, and central to unlearning the enactment of trauma. I needed to listen. Hector-Kannemeyer (2010:28) writes that

> The connection between the listener and the teller of testimony becomes crucial in the process of reconciliation and healing, which places the listener as an active player in the sharing of testimony. The feeling of being listened to is more crucial than merely relaying an event in history. It is that connection between the hearer and sharer, which serves as the catalyst for linking the past with reality. The listener goes through the trauma with the victim, goes through the reality that the loved ones are not coming back, time has been lost, what has been destroyed or taken cannot be replaced, living with the unfulfilled hope that things, people, time etc, will be restored. The only difference in this trauma is that the victim is not alone, that his/her pain and loss is valued and acknowledged, because s/he is listened to. The listener has now become the witness.

It is the duty of the listener to identify a way in which to complete accurately the act of listening by writing what has been witnessed. If it is not written, what is the use of listening, and if listening remains an act that only I engage with, what of the healing of others that are not listened to? Who has the right to write their stories? Cixous (1976:880-881) contends that

> [B]y writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.
> […]
> It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Women should break out of the snare of silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem.

> Woman's writing becomes "organic writing," "nurturing-writing" (nourricriture), resisting separation. It becomes a "connoting material," a "kneading dough," a "linguistic flesh". And it draws its corporeal fluidity from images of water - a water from the source, a deep, subterranean water that trickles in the womb, a meandering river, a flow of life, of words running over or slowly dripping down the pages. This keeping-alive and life-giving water exists simultaneously as the writer's ink, the mother's milk, the woman's blood and menstruation. (Minh-ha, 1989:38)

Fictocriticism seems to be the most productive mode of writing to let flow the subterranean water, to unblock the stagnant river that will restore blood flow to those deadened parts of the body, awakening what has been hidden, silenced, forgotten, or deadened. It thus allows me to use newly restored limbs to complete the act of listening, to write myself into the text, a mode of writing from and toward womxn (see **Met die Helm Gebore**). Gleaning from the way in which I have described fictocriticism, it is then not only figured as a mode of writing that resists phallocentric writing in the way that Cixous asks womxn to resist, but is also productive in functioning as a bridge between academic discourse and the language of everyday life.

The necessity of an entry point into the language of everyday life is important. Significantly, fictocriticism is rhizomatic, a mode of writing that is made up of and offers multiple entry points giving agency back to the reader, since we(you) can decide where to start, how to (re)read, and in what order we(you) choose to walk through the text. In this project specifically, the reader is given the choice of how to read the text. Consisting of various entries, the reader

can start with any entry they(you) choose. Some entries will refer the reader to other entries which, read together, tell an entirely different story than each entry read on its own. The entries may also refer the reader to dead ends, mysteries, and questions left unanswered.[*2] As an assemblage of entries, footnotes, notes in the margin, poems and prose, this text necessarily consists of a multitude of entry points, and re-entry points that reach across, through, under, over one another, and await the reader's entry as the most important party in the conversation. For without the reader, these entries (doorways) remain merely bridges uncrossed and have no point at which to converge, diverge, conflict and enrich one another. The river does not reach the sea, the river does not reach the village; the river festers and becomes a bacterial cesspool. Without the reader, this project is meaningless, since there is no "place where this multiplicity is collected, united" and no "space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations [the text] consists of; the unity of [this] text is not in its origin, it is in its destination" (Barthes, 1977:148). The reader, and their intersectional identity, is therefore vital to this project. How the reader reads themselves into the text, or enters into a conversation with the text, is how meaning is created in the text. The text and the reader enter into a reciprocal relationship and in the space between the reader and the text, in the space where this reciprocal relationship exists, meaning is created. This reciprocal nature of fictocriticism offers not only an entry point into both academic, creative and public discourse, but also opens communication amongst these, *vis-a-vis* the reader.

***2 Reader:**

You can find a reading map on page vii and viii that will help you navigate your journey. Use it as you please. Follow the words as you wish and follow whichever path you want. The paths you take might show you something about me and/or they might show you something about yourself.

The orifices of the body of writing (which includes fictional and critical writing) have been clogged by the constant ejaculation of phallocentric writing. Cixous (1976:879) writes of the manner in which

> Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallocentric tradition. It is indeed that same self-admiring, self-stimulating, self-congratulatory phallocentrism.

This allegiance to the phallocentric tradition in the history of writing has created a division between the logic of oral speech and the logic of writing, separating the latter as mutually

exclusive from the former. This very separation confines the narratives of queer humxns to the (shadowy) margins (and therefore to silence) since the phallocentric tradition tends not to value *voiced and embodied* narratives as legitimate (turn to **The Heaped Bones of August** where you will find someone phallocentric tradition has tried to hide). Cixous (1976:879) affirms this, by saying that "until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy," and "this is a locus where the repression of women [and Queer people have] been perpetuated". The resurrection of the (importance of the) reader, therefore, not only unclogs the orifices of the body of writing, it creates a space for marginal humxns to claim our voice.

Fictocritical writing does not only aim to disrupt and unclog, but also aims to produce and regulate the flow of fresh air through the orifices that were previously blocked. Much like the plants growing in between the red brick, this is a process which not only aims to disrupt and resist the superimposition of man on nature, it also aims to replace that superimposition with itself. This flow of fresh, fictocritical air is critical to sustain the life of academic discourse and the language of everyday life. Academic discourse, specifically intersectional feminist theory, should strategize and think through ways in which to create a society that is free of discrimination and aim to write against the systems that are at the very core of this discrimination that contaminates and corrupts the freedom of humxns. This writing must necessarily take on a queer form so as to bend and question the rules of these systems. While academic texts are purported to be sites of critical thinking, in reality, this is not the case. As it stands,

> academic texts reduce their subject of analysis to fixed meanings and readings. This is achieved by the reductive and dialectic style of scholarly writing as it discards any elements that distract from the, more often than not, linear argument. If the detractors are not discarded, then they are swiftly dealt with, proven to be aberrant, incorrect, or just irrelevant… Despite the developments and shifts in intellectual beliefs, which acknowledge the partiality of knowledge, there remains an institutional reliance on old systems of belief that wish to fix knowledge through the notion of objectivity (Flavell, 2004:42-43).

> One of the rules of my game is to echo back his words to an unexpected din or simply let them bounce around to yield most of what is being and has been said through them and despite them. (Minh-ha, 1989:49)

This rigorous approach to writing the subject, informed by the phallocentric tradition, therefore does not make space for the fluidity and the paradoxical nature of humxn identity and reality, does not allow for leakage and excess. Intersectional feminist theory locates itself, in its very name, around and on the intersections, the border crossings, of the various identities, and experiences that constitute the humxn being and what those intersections mean for *being* in the world. For instance, intersectional feminist theory enables me to think through the ways in the intersections of my identity as white, Queer, able-bodied, Afrikaans, middle-class and womxn influence the way I exist in the world (see Crenshaw, 1989). Academic writing, in its current state, does not and is not able to sufficiently write these intersections; these intersections make it impossible to reduce the subject to a single reading and a fixed meaning. Indeed, Minh-ha (1989:70) notes that "the search for meaning will always arrive at a meaning through I" and she calls on the writer for raw honesty in this: "I, therefore, am bound to acknowledge the irreducibility of the object studied and the impossibility of delivering its presence, reproducing it as it is in its truth, reality, and otherness". Thus, even fictocriticism, that I have identified as a good *attempt* at delivering my participants' presence, embodying them as they are in their truth, reality and otherness, will only ever be an incomplete endeavour, a reaching out to, a grasping at straws. It is therefore important for me, this 'I', to "explicitly assume a critical responsibility towards [my text's] discourse, exposing its status as inheritor of the very system of signs it sets out to question, disturb, and shatter" (Minh-ha, 1989:71). At the very core of my project must remain a hyper-awareness of my power as the person with the pen in hand *writing next to*, and the b(l)inding power I have as a speaker and writer of the language I use to write and speak in. To decentralise and question this power, this project will be built on input from various communities, using a style of "writing, like a game that defies its own rules, an ongoing practice that may be said to be concerned, not with inserting a 'me' into language, but with creating an opening where the 'me' disappears while 'I'[5] endlessly come and go, as the nature of language requires" (Minh-ha, 1989:23).

This 'I' is however entirely ignored in the phallocentric tradition of writing that currently dominates academia and still firmly proscribes against the personal, the self, to be animated in the text:

[5] 'I', here, refers to a collective 'I', a multiplicity of 'i's'.

> The student learning the academic essay style is required to order and control their material to enact closure in a convincing fashion that proves their mastery over their topic and material. If the student is being asked to strictly follow the traditional academic essay form, they are also required to evacuate the text of any traces of personal interest. Anything personal—according to the conventions of academic writing—should be confined to the preface or acknowledgments. The serious academic is expected to do the same (Flavell, 2004:43).

This positions the academic as an 'objective third party' devoid of the identity and experience from which they write. This objectivity is, however, impossible since writers always write from a specific positionality and thus through a specific perspective that comes about from this positionality. The imagined objectivity taught to students entering academia and upheld within academic writing does not, however, allow the subject flexible entry points. This therefore blocks the exchange and communication between 'I' of the general public and academic writing. Without an exchange between and communication with the public and creative writing, academic writing becomes an ivory tower engaged in intellectual masturbation, inaccessible to all those outside academia and relevant only to itself:

> Indeed, theory no longer is theoretical when it loses sight of its own conditional nature, takes no risk in speculation, and circulates as a form of administrative inquisition. Theory oppresses, when it wills or perpetuates existing power relations, when it presents itself as a means to exert authority - the Voice of Knowledge (Minh-ha, 1989:42).

Academic writing often perpetuates the very othering it is meant to counter. To open communication between academic discourse and the language of the everyday, a brick by brick dismantling of the ivory tower that academia has become is vital. If inaccessible to public discourse, academic discourse (specifically intersectional theory) becomes useless and excessive. If academic discourse (again, specifically intersectional theory) is not continually informed by lived experiences, can it be called intersectional feminist theory? What purpose does it then serve?

Fictocriticism aims to mimic culture and capture something of culture in writing. To say therefore that it is new, is to cut off the hands that have carried and written it into being, to sew up the lips that have spoken and questioned it into being, and to blind the eyes that have predicted its coming, since the first word spoken by, and the first forms of literature emerged

among humxns. For instance, a rich source of storytelling that fictocriticism is similar to and can be said to mimic is the tradition of oral storytelling. In writing about the oral literature of the /Xam, and in particular about "The Story in Which the Children Are Sent to Throw the Sleeping Sun into the Sky", Michael Wessels (2008a:482) notes how the story could

> reflect either power differentials in Bushman social systems, or a non-hierarchical ecological interdependence. The manner in which women and children together determine the position of the sun could be cited as evidence of an egalitarian ethos that is blind to age and gender. Conversely, it could be read as a compensatory mechanism whereby old women and children are granted a role in stories that they lack in ordinary daily life.

What Wessels' reading illuminates is that despite, or perhaps because of, the various ways in which the story could be interpreted, the /Xam mediated and interpreted their experiences and environment through the complexities of their stories, creating both affective and critical worldings of their cultures. Fictocriticism, as a form of writing that employs storytelling through prose and poetry alongside critical writing, functions in ways analogous to these oral storytelling traditions, a claim which I base on and hope to illustrate with the help of Michael Wessels' reading of /Xam stories. Storytelling is used as a medium through which to begin to understand our experiences. Wessels' reading of /Xam stories could also suggest that the method of cut-and-stitch, of overlaying various texts and forms of knowledge, to highlight ideas that on their own these texts did not necessarily suggest, was also used in the oral storytelling tradition of the /Xam. Wessels (2008a:485, 491) notes how in 'The Story in Which the Children Are sent to Throw the Sleeping Sun into the Sky', "there is a unity of forces, a balance between old and young, male and female, as the human community directs its energies towards procuring a reliable source of energy". Subsequently "there is a sense of creation unfurling through the medium of a tapestry of agents". Elsewhere, Wessels (2013:7) also notes the manner in which the /Xam narratives are

> capable of endless permutation and reconfiguring, full of cut and paste, of intertextual allusion and digression. The narrative, we can assume, existed not only in as many versions as there were tellers of it but also in the countless (both because there must have been many and because we cannot count them) performances.

What this points to, for Wessels (2008a:489), is the /Xam understanding that:

> The social participates in the individual: it is the necessary factor in the potentiation of individuality. But the individual also participates in the social. The properties of the individual

> illuminate the world of the social, facilitating its activities. The individual, thus, forms part of a social ecology that embraces nature and culture. Difference is necessary in the larger scheme of things.

The forms of fictocriticism on which I draw in my thesis are thus influenced not only by innovative feminist intersectional forms of theory; I also borrow inspiration from the storytelling techniques of /Xam oral literature.

Fictocriticical texts also tend to mimic, in terms of structure and style, the subject matter under discussion. For instance, Jill Farrar's important fictocritical text *The Glossary* often employs the concept of the *flaneuse* and readers may feel as if they are walking through the text, choosing which street to turn onto next, encountering dead ends, or having to retrace steps. Similarly, there are various ways in which my own text's structure, writing style, and language will mimic or follow on from the subject matter it is discussing. Here, again, my insipiration is not only experimental Western writing and theory, but also the oral storytelling tradition of the /Xam as Michael Wessels writes about it. Wessels (2008a:485) writes that the /Xam storytelling tradition employed "switching of narrative voice". This technique "characterises the /Xam stories in general" and "affords obvious opportunities for dramatisation and characterisation. In many of the stories the technique of shifting narrative voice allows for multiple perspectives" (Wessels, 2008a:485). Another manner in which the stories' structures are similar to their subject matter is the use of repetition which "is a technique that is integral to the discursive effect of the narrative" (Wessels, 2008a:481).

Another crucial narrative strategy to be found in both fictocriticism and oral storytelling is the returning of agency to the reader or listener. As I have pointed out, my text, like many fictocritical texts, is written to be read non-linearly, a liberating dis/ordering which has the potential to create an enlarged community of reception and meaning, in which multiple paths of interpretation are explicitly welcomed, and enabled. Similarly, oral storytelling often happens in groups where the narrator tells/adapts/changes the story according to the audience's reactions and desires. In writing about the oral story telling traditions of Native American people, Hodge, Pasqua, Marquez and Eishirt-Cantrell (2002:4), describe how

> [S]tories present positive as well as negative situations and show consequences of each; the listener is then left to make his or her own choices. […] The listeners are then invited to interpret the stories through their own experience. In fact, many topics can come up, arising out of

> various interpretations of a single story. Often there is more than one character in the story, which provides several possible solutions to a given situation.

This lack of fixed meaning is an attempt by these storytellers to engage and articulate the 'sacred' as an elusive potency. Josephs (2008:264) writes that

> [T]he notion of 'sacred' here implied is that of 'the Unknowable' (not simply an unknown which in time might be a known). It could be called 'the Inconceivable' (beyond human knowing or conceptualizing). It is the leap, the space, the possibility of the eternal emergent. And the underlying 'reason' for emphasizing an emerging process. The end was not certainty or any unchangeable conclusion.

Both fictocritical texts and oral narratives attempt to articulate themselves as reaching out to writing often ungraspable meaning, meaning that infinitely (re)emerges with every (re)encounter it has with each new audience/reader and each new audience/reader that it enters into conversation with. For instance, Wessels (2008a:494) highlights the manner in which "for a /Xam auditor, a story's meaning would never have been fixed and transparent. Rather, its telling would have provided an opportunity for the experience and processing of a variety of ideas and feelings. The story would always have been an invitation to exegesis". This reaching out, lack of fixed meaning and/or gesturing toward a conclusion that is only ever an ellipsis, makes these texts relevant to each audience/reader that encounters it and "celebrate a process of becoming that is open-ended" (Wessels, 2008a:490).

The final shared characteristic that I will highlight is that both oral storytelling and fictocriticism are acts of resistance. Fictocriticism is an act of resistance against phallocentric writing and dominant modes of thinking that aim to divide fictional and critical writing, and through such a division keep in place powerful forms of binarised and hierarchical thinking. My own text is an act of resistance against dominant narratives regarding queer humxns, an act of resistance against "his ear, eye, and pen, which record in his language while pretending to speak through mine, on my behalf" (Minh-ha, 1989:48). This is an act of resistance that resists by merely existing and does not exist merely to resist. Similarly, Wessels (2008b:348,345) alludes to the manner in which /Xam stories are "accounts of the permeability of order" and that "alienation and oppressiveness of the narrators' lives in colonial Cape society evoked a sense of the integrity of their own culture and inspired them to tell more traditional stories".

With this in mind, I want to wrench fictocriticism from the mouths of those Canadian and Australian writers that have figured themselves as the creators and first proponents of fictocritical writing, and place it back in the mouths of oral storytellers who have employed these strategies in the first forms of literature, an agency taken up by many writers, amongst whom Trinh T. Minh-ha features prominently. It is in this vein that I use fictocriticism to (re)imagine writing myself and the stories of my people as raced and gendered and queer and in so doing affirm our lives as meaningful, eternalising our lives in text. (*What drives me so urgently to eternalise our lives? Turn to* **Notes of queerness and the archive** *to explore this question with me.)*

B.

Jou diepste, verste spore loop ook dood. Your deepest, furthest traces are also fading.[6]

My (body of) writing
has been
interrupted,
broken (into),
violated.

One evening, while I was having dinner with my mother, my laptop was stolen from her car.

Under the streetlight, the glass squares shimmer.

My chest is shattering.

I had not backed up large portions of my research for this project.

Police arrive.

"Ma'am, you can make a case at the police station,

but unfortunately, there is nothing we can do for you at this stage.

All the recordings of interviews with Queer womxn, poetry, texts, scattered thoughts noted on documents, photographs, video recordings, music, and many files that I can't even recall or name, have been stolen from me.

I am left with a phantom limb.

[6] The title of this entry is from Koos du Plessis' (2004) *Vermiste Mense* in *Erfdeel,* 230. As a constant guiding voice in my creative writing, a voice that is Afrikaner and thus from my culture, from my home (language), I want to honour him by paying homage to him, honour him for his guidance, honour him as part of the lineage of Afrikaners from which I write, and honour him for the way his words have so often articulated the shudders of life. Through this homage in my fictocritical work, I call on him to continue guiding me here too.

1. Jy hoor my nie meer nie; ek loop ongesiens. You can no longer hear me; I walk without being seen. [7]

I thought of them last night when I couldn't sleep. I thought of them this morning when I woke up. Their stories tug at my earlobes, scratch inside my skull. Their stories remain close enough for me to hear and see, but too far to touch. When I think of them, I wonder: does the theft, the loss that has occurred, mean that I have failed them? Can my project now no longer tell their stories? Could I ever completely tell their stories, even if my research archive was still whole? The rupture that occurred in and on (the body of) my archive reveals to me how porous, fractured, haemorrhaged, precarious my archive has always been, with its fragments and traces faint, interrupted traces of the traces of Queer womxn's stories.

> *Get up, walk around, sit again. Get up, walk around, sit again. Get up, walk around, put on music, sit again. Try to comprehend, contemplate what the theft of the work might mean. Try to make meaning from absence.*

I turn[8] *to Koos du Plessis'* Vermiste Mense *[Missing People], to find guidance. Koos is an Afrikaans singer song-writer who so often has guided me by writing into being the heaviness of loss and the emptiness that follows soon after. At first, my loss is all that occupies my mind and the music lingers in the background. Then, slowly but surely, Koos' voice fills the room and the lyrics begin to name what I cannot:*[9]

> Jou naam kom nooit na vore, nie in grou geregskantore, nie in lêers oor verhore nie; jou diepste, verste spore loop ook dood. Ek kan dit nie verduur nie; daar's geen saak en geen dossier nie, nie 'n deur wat nog skanier nie en die wete: Jy's nie hier nie, word soos lood.
> *[Your name no longer appears anywhere, not in grey courts of law, or files of court hearings;*

[7] This heading is my translation of an excerpt from Koos du Plessis' (2004) *Groet Sonder Woorde* on page 188 of *Erfdeel,* his collected works.
[8] I am turning here, maybe you are turning here too, the text is turning. All turning, turning, turning in on ourselves.
[9] If you can, find a quiet place to listen to the song.

> *your deepest, furthest traces are also fading. I cannot bear it, there is no case number and no dossier, no door still swinging on its hinges and the knowing: You're no longer here, turns to lead.]* (Du Plessis, 2004:230, my translation)

Think.

Feel.

Sit down.

Write.

Central to this thesis project are stories of queer humxns, with a specific focus on retracing the paths of the stories of the eight Queer womxn I interviewed. But with the theft, the archive I have curated and collected consists only of traces now, some digital, some in my memory, some on my body, some proxies in the memories of others. Now, their "name[s] no longer appear anywhere, not in grey courts of law, or files of court hearings; [their] deepest, furthest traces are also fading". My archive has been disfigured.

(Yes. *yes.*

but no no no, *has it not always been disfigured?*)

One of the urgent issues that fuels me to write is that the larger archival project is always already a failed project, since it has never been able to represent or tell the nuanced stories of queer folk and "the archival record is but a sliver of social memory" (Harris, 2002:64) and "there is no case number and no dossier, no door still swinging on its hinges", only queer phantoms, (dis)figure(ment)s and spectres. As such, my archive was always inherently ruptured and incomplete, always unable to document the womxn's stories, which even in their telling were elusive, ever-changing stories. How, then (how, *now*), do I contend with their ever-present absence, their absent presence[*1] that haunts me? How do I retrace this path which has become different and obscure, with only vestiges of vague road signs left to follow? How do I shape a new limb for this 'body' of my writing, so that it can continue finding a way forward?

That Koos was able to articulate and create *something* from his loss, words that today, so many years later, come to take my hand, queerly guides me to the possibility of moving forward and writing from the loss of my work. That Koos' articulation of loss, even in his absence, remains so present with me, and with many other writers such as Gert Vlok Nel, queerly reminds me that from absence there can also be (re)growth. In Koos' present absence, Gert Vlok Nel, for

***1 Absent presence, present absence**

Absence and presence are elusive concepts with long and complex philosophical histories that I will not attempt to explain, disentangle or solve. However, for a moment, I would like to pause and allude to why I join these two terms.

The word "present" is derived from the Old French *present:* "evident, at hand, within reach" thus "present" comes to signify all those things that are within our reach, at hand, and evident (Harper, 2018). What is thought to be its antonym, "absence", is derived directly from Latin *absentem*, the present participle of *abesse* from the assimilated form of *ab* – "off, away from" and *esse* "to be" (Harper, 2018). From this etymology, "absent" and "absence" thus comes to signify all those things that are away from being. It is also clear from this etymology that "absence" is predicated on presence. This etymology already reveals the paradoxical nature of beings that are not-here, not-now and complicates any notion of absence as the binary opposite of presence. For when something or someone is named as absent, it inevitably evokes the memory of their presence. Without the memory of their presence, something or someone cannot be named as absent. Thus, while something or someone is "absent" and therefore "away from being" they remain evident, at hand and within reach, even if only elusively, through the memory of their presence. Yet, even then, "Paul Ricoeur argues that memory is presence that evokes absence" (Nguyen, 2016:185). "While a memory is present in our minds," writes Viet Thanh Nguyen (2016:185), "it inevitably points to what is no longer there but in the past" and therefore no longer within reach, as such. Absence is thus always haunted by presence. Equally "Derrida's theory of trace, a 'double gesture of erasure and inscription' in the sign, posits that the manifestation of presence is a differential movement and presence is not possible apart from absence" (Wallace, 2015:41). Thus, presence is always haunted by absence (see Derrida, 1976).

Ghosts further complicate the notion of presence and absence as opposites since ghosts are keenly felt through their haunting, and therefore seem evident, and therefore present, to the person experiencing the haunting. Yet ghosts are seldom within reach; they are "ruptures in the temporal fabric" (Maddern, 2008:363). Ghosts and their haunting evoke a sense of things that have been disappeared, remain unresolved, have been lost, and/or have gone awry. Through this ghosts often have incredibly powerful presences, often more so than the living, for their presences remain imprinted in the minds of those that experience their haunting. This is particularly evident from the manner in which ghosts remain in the place that they haunt and return over and over again through stories about their haunting (to see examples of this, turn to ***Jou diepste verste spore loop ook dood***, **The Humming Soil of Boontjieskraal**, ***Met die Helm gebore*** and **The Heaped Bones of August**).

Unable to escape the play that exists between presence and absence, it is perhaps more useful to think of ghosts as present absences, absent presences. While even this joining of the two concepts still cannot accurately grasp the sense that ghosts evoke since they are both present and absent, living and dead, inside and outside, and "neither present nor absent, inside nor outside, living nor dead" (Taylor, 2001:103), "present absence, absent presence" does attempt to move toward a more comprehensive expression of the in-betweenness of ghosts.

instance, wrote a song entitled *Waarom Ek Roep Na Jou Vanaand*[10] *(Why I am Calling to You Tonight)* which starts with Gert calling to Koos: "Gert bo die grond roep na Koos onder die grond Kom in, Koos, kom in, kom in."[Gert above the ground calls to Koos underground. Come in, Koos, come in, come in.] He proceeds to call to the ghost of Koos by cutting and stitching several of Koos' lyrics with his own as an homage to Koos, or as he writes "Min of meer hierdie dinge het ek rekonstrueer/Op night-shift duty as mislukte poging tot laaste eer" [More or less, these things I have (re)constructed/ On night shift duty, as a failed attempt at last honour]. While the way Gert calls to, calls for Koos is not the focus here, in processing the loss of my work, I take Gert's and Koos' hands and I gradually begin to imagine that (the body of) my archive has

[10] If you can, find a quiet place to listen to this song.

begun to take a strangely appropriate form; to queer itself, cut and stitch itself, like Gert cut and stitched Koos' work to his own to call him from his absence into presence. In the same way, I want to call the stories of queer humxns into my writing.

It is this that I attempt, tentatively. Travel along with me on these paths. These paths run across my body, the bodies of the queer humxns I am writing about, writing into represented being, and (are) the traces of an archive. The bare bones.

***

2. Daar's skimme, gewikkel in jasse… op reis van perron na perron, in 'n middernagland sonder grense of tyd. There are phantoms wrapped in coats… travelling from platform to platform in a midnight world with neither boundaries nor time. [11]

> *A path is made by repeatedly passing over ground. We can see the path as a trace of past journeys, made out of footprints, traces of feet that tread and in treading create a line on the ground. When people stop treading, the path may disappear* (Ahmed, 2006:554).

I am 12 and walking with Aunty Janet, our domestic worker, to the 7-Eleven*[2] around the corner to buy entjies (cigarettes, from Kaapse Afrikaans) for her and a R2 ice cream for each of us.

***2: 7-Eleven** is your go-to convenience store for food, snacks, hot and cold beverages, gas and so much more. Generally

[11]This heading is a translated excerpt from Du Plessis' (2004) *Skimme* in *Erfdeel,* 221.

open 24 hours a day.

She is telling me a story about the place she comes from called Boontjieskraal in Caledon. (I am older now and the story has stayed with me, clung to the skin around my ears and under my eyes.) *Perhaps later, you and I will find a bench under a tree and then I will tell you the story differently, tell you the story more like it was told to me. But first I will take some time to remember how it goes, and for now I will show you its bare bones* (turn to ***The humming soil of Boontjieskraal*** for my retelling/recollection/remembering/recalling of this story).

It is the story of a traveller, of the people of Boontjieskraal, and of the De Wet family*[3] who (stole the land and) have lived on Boontjieskraal farm for generations. (*We cannot say whose story it is, we do not know who told it first.*)

One stormy night somewhere in the late 1880s, a traveller knocked on the door of Pieter Daniel De Wet. Sometimes the traveller is a man, sometimes a womxn, sometimes a whole family. (*We speak not of the traveller(s), we know not their name(s).*) The traveller asked Pieter for shelter; they were travelling to Botrivier but the ford they needed to cross to continue their journey had been flooded and they had no shelter from the storm. For reasons unexplained and unspoken (reasons at which we can only guess), Pieter denied the traveller shelter. Refused the traveller entry into his home. Forced to cross the Swart River, one of the family members drowned. Sometimes the child, sometimes the mother and child. (*We speak not of them, we know not their names*) Stricken with grief and anger, the traveller bellowed a curse upon the De Wet family that reverberated across the whole farm: every generation would bear but one son, and that son would die a violent and unnatural death (De Wet & Kersandt, 2013:387-391).

***3. The De Wet family**

The De Wet family is a historic family that still exists today and the haunting presence of the story of Boontjieskraal led me to read their version of the story in a book about the farm entitled *Boontjieskraal- Die Storie van 'n Plaas en sy Mense* written by Doreza de Wet and Uwe Kersandt. From my memory of Aunty Janet telling me the story and from this book, I have collected the bones and ligaments and flesh with which I now (re)tell this story to you. In my (re)telling, (re)thinking, (re)imagining, (re)visiting of this story (as the story so often revisits me), I want to queer the De Wet's narrative and ask the story to show me what is hidden in its silences and pauses.

On Sunday, 18 March 1927, on his way to church in his Model T Ford, the very same Pieter Daniel de Wet drove off

> a low bridge and died. Before his death, Pieter fathered a son, Hendrik Christoffel (Henry) de Wet, who died in the arms of his own son moments after an accident with a threshing machine. Henry also only fathered one son before his death, also named Pieter Daniel De Wet. Pieter and his son, also named Hendrik Christoffel (Henry) De Wet, were driving in his left-hand drive Packard car and, due to fog, rear-ended a truck, immediately killing Pieter and injuring Henry. Henry never married and at the age of 27, on 24 June 1972, on the same road where his father and grandfather had died, Henry drove into an oncoming car and became deceased. He was the last male heir in the bloodline of Pieter Daniel De Wet. His sister, Doreza Helena Marie de Wet, inherited Boontjieskraal farm and continues to live there (De Wet & Kersandt, 2013:387-391).

In the related lineage of the traveller family, the traveller remains nameless, faceless, continuously present but always absent, the bodies of their drowned family leaking and seeping into the soil of Boontjieskraal farm where they were told, once upon a time, that they were unwelcome. The curse and story are kept alive in the continual retelling, for "a story told is a story bound to circulate" (Minh-ha, 1989:134), sprouting and twisting around the roots of the white stinkwood tree and the Cape willow weeping leaves onto the porch. The travelling family lives in the water pouring from the taps, slipping in through the cracks in the walls of the farmhouse, dancing in-between the dust shaken from the linen in the morning. *I remember now that Aunty Janet used to tell me that the traveller was a coloured*[*4] *man. I remember she told me that she thinks this is why Pieter denied the traveller shelter for his family. You may wonder*

***4 coloured**

It is important that I note how I will be using the term 'coloured' since it continues to be a term that is highly contested. Pal Ahluwalia and Abebe Zegeye (2003:259) write that "there is currently no single coloured identity or definition of 'colouredness'", however, "'there is presently a collectivity some millions strong, centred on the Cape Town metropolitan area, that chooses in many circumstances to see itself as 'coloured'" (Western 2001: 620). Historically speaking, the term 'Coloured' was used by colonial and Apartheid states to create division among South Africans of colour. An example of this is The Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950 that defined 'Coloureds' as "persons who are neither "natives' nor whites" (February, 1981: 5). Zimitri Erasmus (2000:84) writes that "the term is generally used to refer to South Africans considered to be of 'mixed race'" and continues to point out that "the idea of 'mixed race' is problematic since it implies fixedness and a mixture of 'pure' 'races'". Ahuwalia and Zegeye (2003:259) further highlight the problematic nature of the idea of 'mixed race' saying that "to categorise people as being of 'mixed descent' was part of both the early authorities' and the later apartheid government's belief in the existence of separate 'races' and 'racial purity'". The violent history of the use of the term 'Coloured' thus give me pause and urges me to engage critically with how I use the term, especially as a white writer. In light of this violent history, Mohamed Adhikari points out that some have even argued that the term 'coloured' should be jettisoned (see Adhikari, 2013). Indeed, "coloured identities are commonly understood as an apartheid relic best forgotten" (Erasmus, 2000:72). Yet, as Erasmus (2000:72) shows, "this view denies the subjective experiences of those historically classified coloured". Adhikari (2013:13) further illustrates this by showing that the violent history of the use of the term 'Coloured' is not the only factor that shapes and has shaped coloured identity: "[coloured identity] is neither ordained by God nor a product of nature as essentialists imply, nor is it a device conjured up by the machinations of white supremacism as instrumentalists argue". He argues that "coloured identity cannot be taken as given but is a product of human agency dependent on a complex interplay of historical, social, cultural, political and other contingencies" (Adhikari, 2013:13). What he is arguing for is a social constructionist approach to coloured identity, which is an approach that considers social identity to be "mainly the product of its bearers… [and a] product of learnt behaviour [that is] moulded by social experience and social interaction" (Adhikari, 2013:15-16). Thus, while social identity is "partly formed through interactions with and against the perceptions of outsiders", Adhikari (2013:15-16) demonstrates that "it can no more be imposed upon people by the state or ruling groups than it can spring automatically from miscegenation or people's supposed racial constitution." Informed by Adhikari's view which highlights the importance of recognising the history of the use of the term 'Coloured', its effects, as well as the agency of coloured people and their active ongoing participation in the creation of their own identity, I follow his lead and the lead of other coloured scholars on the use of the term 'coloured' and base my use of the term on the manner which they have written about the term. Like Helene Strauss, I am cognisant of the fact that the term 'coloured' may be insufficient as a referent "for the myriad and complexly articulated identities that were both impacted by, and resistant to, its legislative and discursive reach" and that 'coloured' "invites both identification and dis-identification" (2013: 43-44). I will thus be using 'coloured' "to refer to either self-identified members of, or ones previously legislated as belonging to, this group" (Strauss, 2013:43) and thus to refer to "those South Africans loosely bound together for historical reasons such as slavery and a combination of oppressive and preferential treatment during apartheid" (Erasmus, 2000:84). My use of the term also considers that "the creation of coloured identity is… an ongoing, dynamic process in which groups and individuals make and remake their perceived realities and thus also their personal and social identities" (Adhikari, 2013:13). In some of my entries, you will meet people who are engaged in this dynamic process that Adhikari mentions, such as the travelling family in **The humming soil of Boontjieskraal,** Samad in **Met die Helm Gebore**, and, in some ways, Antjie Somers in **The heaped bones of August (or a wilting whisper of Antjie Somers)**.

why the Boontjieskraal story is important for the journey you and I are taking together. Come wonder and wander with me.

I want to be clear that it has never interested me whether the story is true or not, fabricated or real. Like Trinh T. Minh-ha, I think that the veracity of a story is the most banal aspect to consider; the factual truth quotient of a narrative, and the associated questions, are irrelevant to me. What is more intriguing is the continual disruptive re-turning of the story, the persistence of the story and the curse embedded in its folds. I am intrigued by how the travelling family and their story teeter on the edge of the present and the past

with a "seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities" (Gordon, 2008:8). Despite Pieter Daniel de Wet - a Christian man who should love others as he loves himself, and an Afrikaner man supposedly known for his Afrikaner hospitality - not extending hospitality to the traveller and his family at a crucial moment and denying them access to his home, the travelling family continues to live in (their disruption and haunting of) the homes and lives of the De Wet family. This curious narrative resilience, a capacity for morphing that eludes containment, is evidently important to my wider project. Like the Queer womxn I interviewed, whose presences queerly reappear in spaces that deny them access, like Queerness that is denied a record in the archive, or only given a record as deviant and criminal, the traveller continuously and inevitably (re)turns to Boontjieskraal. Their (queer) stories continuously (re)appear in an unwritten archive that lives on the tongues of people, tongues that mediate between thought and speech. This orality, too, constitutes a record of sorts, spectral and elusive, but insistently finding an uneasy home among the inhospitable history of story that would prefer to have denied the travellers their rightful place.

As Peter Melville (2003:28) writes in his PhD dissertation, "Romantic Hospitality: Theorizing the Welcome in Rousseau, Kant, Coleridge, and Mary Shelley", "despite the rule of the household, the undesirable (the oppositional or hostile guest) always arrives; it visits regardless of (indeed, because of) any attempt to exclude it". The travelling family, designated as undesirable by the De Wet family, haunts them, continually arriving at their doorstep, skirting around the corners of legibility, braided like vines into the cracks of their walls, in resistance to and as a negation of their exclusion. Indeed, (the story of) the travelling family returns precisely because of the attempt to silence, erase and exclude them (and their story) from the archive, haunting and returning "to where they have been excluded from" (Derrida, 2000:152). The ability of the curse to disrupt and haunt the De Wet family lurks in the reproduction and retelling of the story in which the curse is engrained. And while the initial curse speech act functioned to disrupt the lineage of the De Wet name, perhaps its ensuing power also lies in what (retelling) the story reveals. "Tales are collective dreams that move and mold[sic] societies," Minh-ha (2011:16-17) observes, "revealing the actual fears, desires, aims and values by which communities are shaped". Exploring the legible (and/or audible) contours of the story of Boontjieskraal is an opportunity then to lean our ears and eyes closer to Afrikaans folklore and what it can tell us about those who people the story, both the travellers and the De Wets - an act that could subtly rethink received South African his/stories.

"Folklore theory and methodology", as Marilyn Motz (1998: 340) reminds me, has the ability "to explore the practice of belief, an approach that enables us to examine important aspects of culture that otherwise elude a scholarly grasp". The story lends us hands to cup against the windows of Afrikaner homes and provides us with eyes to peer into spaces that might still prefer to keep us out, whoever we are. With each uncanny return, there is a move back to what has been supressed and unspoken. My own (re)turn to this story is a movement towards my own (Afrikaans and Afrikaner) ghosts: a way of creating a space to speak to them and to let them speak (to me), or to sit with them in silence. As the story (and the travelling family) live "seen but unseen, said but unsaid, floating just out of reach," they become the "ghostly reminder of tasks left undone," the task of reckoning with those that Afrikaner hospitality has relegated to the margins, of reckoning with (my) inhospitality to (my own) ghosts, of "insights unnoticed, omissions uncorrected" (Motz, 1998:341). (Turn to **Met die Helm Gebore** to search for (in)sight with me.)

3. Ek soek vergeefs na lank vermiste mense, wat om my is maar onbereikbaar ver. In vain, I search for people who have been missing for too long, they are around me but too far to reach. [12]

> *The ghost is primarily a symptom of what is missing. It gives notice not only to itself but also to what it represents. What it represents is usually a loss, sometimes of life, sometimes of a path not taken. From a certain vantage point the ghost also simultaneously represents a future possibility, a hope (Gordon 2008:63-64).*

Some say that the story is (re)told by the predominantly coloured farming community surrounding Boontjieskraal who birthed the story from a place of discontent with the white owners of the farm. Marilyn Motz (1998:342) reminds us that "legends about places humanize physical spaces and lay claim to territory regardless of legal ownership or official nomenclature. They alter the identity of a place and make it habitable, associating with it a history linking past with present". Thus, (the continuous retelling of) the story of Boontjieskraal and its ability to haunt is one of the ways in which those who have been displaced from their land at the hand of the De Wets disruptively presence themselves, not only in the minds of the De Wets, but also in the white imaginary, demanding to be reckoned with and faced, demanding

[12] This heading is from *Vermiste Mense* in *Erfdeel,* 230.

"a hospitable memory *out of a concern for justice*" (Gordon, 2008:64, her emphasis). Their story claims a space in the archive, on its own terms and without asking for permission (*yes, but also perhaps not? There seems to be more to this story than being relegated to the dead, marked, and categorised status of archived memorial. But more about this in* **Notes on queerness and the archive** *on page B-11).*Through this disruption and haunting (of the De Wet bloodline), the unnamed, the dispossessed make themselves (un)known, (un)knowable and (in)visible[13] where they have been erased and/or silenced and/or marked as undesirable, now laying claim to their territory, yet remaining out of the reach of the material. For the De Wet family, the reproduction of their name in the form of the male heir does not only signify the continuation of their lineage but also serves as an "alibi for a re-production of political and social structures that ensures a conservative propagation of things as they are, complete with systemic inequalities" (Lothian, 2016:450). Such a narrative propagation works to secure not only the generational success of the De Wet family, but also the maintenance of their power as white land owners. The (historical and narrative) disruption of this propagation (as a result of the curse and/or its retelling) thus potentially means that their bloodline is continually cut short in the repeated circulation of the folk lore, and that their power is (or gradually begins to be) lost and the circumstances that engender that power may no longer be so confidently reproduced. Perhaps, like the archive, the De Wet's hospitality (Afrikaner-gasvryheid), and the inclusion and exclusion that is inevitably coupled with these, "exist to validate and safeguard a certain social and legal order for future existence" (Edenheim, 2014:41). Thus, the curse poses a certain threat to the De Wets and more broadly to the white imagination and white comfortability.*[5] Through this haunting, this queer(y)ing, "we're notified that what's been suppressed or concealed is very much alive and present, messing or interfering precisely with those always incomplete forms of containment and repression" (Gordon, 2011:2).

3.1. Notes on queerness and the archive

Queerness and queer(y)ing as I use it here and elsewhere, alludes to queerness beyond its signification as an umbrella term for the LGBTQIAP+[14] community and as "a more radical politics - an interrogation and disruption of social norms" (Kapoor, 2015:1613).

While I do use the term Queer to signify sexual and gendered orientations, I am also interested in how queer signifies deviance from the norm, designating those who refuse to, who

[13] "Visibility is a complex system of permission and prohibition, of presence and absence, punctuated alternately by apparitions and hysterical blindness" (Kipnes 1988:158)

[14] LGBTQIAP+: Acronym that signifies the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Bi-gender, Transgender, Queer, Questioning Intersex, Asexual, A-romantic, A-gender, Pansexual community.

***5. Alibis**

It comes as no surprise that the De Wet family denies the facticity of this story (see *Boontjieskraal: The Story of a Farm and Its People* written by Doreza de Wet and Uwe Kersandt.). De Wet and Kersandt (2013:291) write:

> The "De-Wet curse" is a story that makes for good reading in the tabloids and that is what it is; a story invented by someone who did not know the facts pertaining to the deaths of the sons in the previous generations, did not know the statistics of fatalities along the N2 between Bot River and Caledon, which would have placed Pieter's death in perspective, and did not know about the legendary reputation for hospitality enjoyed by farmers like Ou Vader. It is that reputation that makes the suggestion that Ou Vader turned people away from his home one stormy night, ludicrous.
>
> Moreover, curses are associated with witchcraft and the occult. Christians don't believe in them, but the rumours that they bring up do help to sell newspapers.

In this extract, De Wet and Kersandt attempt to undermine the credibility of the story through a careful appeal to reason, statistics, and a steadfast belief in the hospitable nature and character of Pieter Daniel De Wet (and farmers like him) relying on the so-called inherently hospitable nature of Afrikaners. Yet, what underlies this denial is a clear awareness and recognition of the presence of the story (and the embedded curse) in their lives, undermining the credibility of the story thus seems like an attempt to lay the story to rest. They even note the occult nature of the curse (turn to **The Heaped Bones of August**). I must wonder: for what other reason would one want to lay a story to rest, as one would the presence of a ghost, other than that the story was too troubling, haunting? Thus, underlying this attempt at laying the story to rest is a recognition and admission of the persistently disruptive nature of the story (and the embedded curse) in the lives of the De Wets. Furthermore, it signals to me that perhaps they, and many Afrikaners like them, are not yet ready to face their ghosts - our ghosts - or what those ghosts might reveal to us, since laying a story to rest by hoping to prove it untrue means that the conditions producing the haunting have not been addressed: "Haunting is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known," Avery Gordon (2008:2) remarks, "especially when [the repressed or unresolved social violences] are supposedly over and done with … or when their oppressive nature is continuously denied". Facing our ghosts means confronting and taking responsibility for the social violence that created that haunting and "ending the conditions that produced the disappearance [of the travelling family is] the only way to provide a hospitable memory for the [travelling family]" (Gordon, 2008:115).

cannot, or simply do not, reproduce the social *as is*. I am thinking with Kapoor (2015:1612) when he writes that "the extent [to which] queerness is about deviancy from social norms …is not restricted to issues of sexuality, but can apply equally to categories of race, economy, nation [and/] or gender" and, I would add, more. Thus, in the case of the travelling family (and the story of Boontjieskraal),[15] their multiplicity, (in)visibility, and their operating "from the margins, questioning" and haunting the "normalising power mechanisms and social order" (Kapoor, 2015:1613), characterises them as queer beings. In that sense, then, the traveller's curse and the subsequent haunting, with its disruptive binding power over the generational success of the De Wet family, can also be read as a queer act. And while the travelling family might have been (read as) heterosexual and heteronormative, to oppose (white) reproductive futurism (see Edelman, 2004), as the traveller's curse does, "is to be marked as queer regardless of sexual or political identifications" (Lothian, 2016:450). Just as Pieter Daniel De Wet denied the traveller a future by denying them shelter and condemning them to sure death, the traveller, through his curse, then relegates the De Wet family to the (queer in-between) space of those who do not (and can no longer) contribute, untroubled, to the (re)production of a (white patriarchal) future, the shadowlands on the horizon. The curse and subsequent haunting become the traveller's act of resistance, an act of negation against the privileges of

[15] On our path, we will also encounter other figures who can be read as queer figures in a similar way to the travelling family.

a white heteronormative social order's sentimentalised futurity (Grahovac, 2013). Indeed, the desire of the traveller's curse, and thus the narrative desire of the story, is to end the De Wet's reproduction and thus end the reproduction of what they represent. This is a distinctly queer desire since "for Edelman, queer desire symbolizes the end of reproduction and thus stands in for the trauma of incomprehensible finitude" (Edenheim, 2014:47). What remains is a curse, and the story in which it is embedded, which roams free of a body (queerly) (re)produced in tension against the strictures of heteronormativity, on the tongues of people (many of whom are marked undesirable by heteronormativity). It is this very orality and untraceable origin of the story – in contravention of normative origins associated with reproductive futurity - that allows it to be (re)born(e) in a manner that is unbidden and uncontrollable. This orality rhizomatically (re)creates the story with each (re)telling, (re)turn and each embellishment (turn to **Nou weet ek net jy sal my steeds gevange hou. Now I know only you will still captivate me** to explore a language of queer storytelling with me). This ability to haunt the centre from the margins is what makes this such a queer story. For "queer desire is drawn out of its idiosyncrasy and refusal of universalization," and "queer fantasies, after all, reside in not being monumental, not being in the centre, not being in focus" (Edenheim, 2014:48). Thus, like the present absence, absent presence of the traveller disrupts the De Wet family bloodline, the ever-elusive and changing narrative form the story lives in - and through which the curse and haunting is propagated and (re)produced - disrupts and resists any attempt at archiving. The traveller/s and his/their story refuse the categorical containment which archiving insists upon and any attempt to archive reflects not necessarily the intention to remember the (queer) travelling family and their story – the story through its haunting and retelling ensures this already. Rather, archiving this story suggests an attempt to contain the story (much like the De Wets do in their version of the story). For this reason, it may be dangerous to say, as I have done earlier, that the Boontjieskraal story 'claims space in the archive', even if the suggested archive here would be an alternative queer archive (see Halberstam, 2005 & Cvetkovich, 2003), since the purpose of the archive, even (or maybe especially) a queer archive of feeling, can be imagined as an effort precisely to *preserve* the past.

Here Edenheim's (2014) thinking cautions me to return to my own archive, a ghost which I must face, and reflect on and be critical of my obsession with documenting and archiving the lives of Queer people. I'm thinking of the dread with which I was filled when my archive was stolen from me and what the root was of that dread: the fear that only traces remain of those womxn's stories, and that my story may disappear in the same way. I must ask myself why I

was so fearful of only traces of our stories and lives remaining. Edenheim (2014:54) is helpful in unpicking this fear. Firstly, part of this obsession can perhaps be explained as

> a quest for eternal reproduction, a sort of assurance that only our archiving desire will preserve a (recognizable) queer time and place in the future. There is no confidence, then, in the repetition of the symbolic order; there is only a fear of not being remembered "as we were," fear of not being represented by future researchers, fear of not being able to reproduce an offspring "like us"" (Edenheim, 2014:53).

(This eerily reminds me of Pieter Daniel de Wet's fear explored in **He Who Stands Guard at the Door**). Secondly, this fear may be coupled with the "anxiety of exclusion [from the archive]. Since inclusion in the archive is deemed synonymous with life, exclusion from the archive means death, a death that the archivist is responsible for" (Edenheim, 2014:53). This reveals my own attempt at "running away from the finitude promised by the death drive" (Edenheim, 2014:49). I can also not be romantic about this and say that my only wish was to remember Queer lives *for Queer people* since Queer people do not need to be told to remember ourselves. Following on from Edenheim (2014:47), I must then ask: "for whom we are expected to narrate our feelings and experiences, for whom we should make sense of these feelings and experiences". Indeed, "a history makes the excluded comprehensible not only for themselves but, perhaps more importantly, for the already included" (Edenheim, 2014:46) and I must thus admit that part of documenting the lives of Queer womxn may have been rooted in making our experiences teachable to normative people. However, to preserve, pin down, categorise or mark the Queer womxn I interviewed, the traveller, or the Boontjieskraal story, would be to take away what makes these disruptive, what makes these queer (you can turn to **There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in** for more on this). As Edenheim (2014:49) observes,

> an archive is a guarantee for a future that remains faithful to the present, a guarantee that my desire, my institutions, and my existence are not only represented in the future but also recognizable by those people occupying that future present. To put it bluntly, all archives strive toward a reproduction of life as we know it and the archive of feeling seems to be no exception.

What the story (and/or its retelling) suggests is that the traveller and their curse are interested in precisely not reproducing the social as is, since the children (of both the De Wets and the

traveller) as bearers of the putative implied future are refused. More precisely "the future itself is refused as the reproduction of an intolerable present" (Ní Dhúill, 2016:370).

This is a suggestion and interest that I want to take up, since this refusal suggests perhaps the hope for (and possibility of) a relation to the future that is different from that of (hetero)normativity. This refusal thus leads me away from conventionally trying to archive queer lives and queer stories, and instead I draw the helm over my eyes to see how and why these stories haunt us (in **Met die Helm Gebore** I explore the practice of drawing the helm over my eyes). What is clear then – is it clear? – is that the key to the possibility of a new relation to future is to meet with the ghosts of the travellers, the ghosts of the De Wets, and "ponder the paradox of providing a hospitable memory for [these] ghosts *out of a concern for justice*" (Gordon, 2008:60). In a textual-spectral meeting with the ghosts that haunt Boontjieskraal, I am interested, like Avery Gordon (2011:5), in locating "some elements of a practice for moving towards eliminating the conditions that produce the haunting in the first place" and the historical alternatives that could have been.

4. Goeiemôre, goeiemiddag, goeienaand! Veels geluk en bly te kenne, vat die hand. Dis alles woorde - net leë woorde - op vals akkoorde. Good morning, good afternoon, good night! Congratulations and nice to meet you, take the hand. These are all empty words, just empty words, on false chords. [16]

The year is drawing to a close. My father and I are visiting my sister and her husband in Namibia, a sister and her husband who are decidedly against my queerness because of their Christianity in a Christian country where queerness is not protected by the Constitution and queer humxns are not even humxns, and therefore not protected against acts of queerphobia. I am a dangerous nothing. Unless disguised by and from myself, I am a danger to myself and others.

I am to visit my family, with my family, and yet, like the traveller – a person marked for the margins, pre-emptively unliked - I stand at the border post, requesting access. Here, where my entry is marked, processed, and stamped, and where I am always only conditionally welcomed at the gates of my sister's new home country, I think of the parts of myself I choose to leave in my own country (which is also not my own country) before entering hers. I leave the parts of myself that I love, but which threaten the heteronormative image that Christianity purports as

[16] This heading is a translated excerpt from *Woorde* in *Erfdeel,* 233.

the ideal towards which to strive. My entry as a queer womxn is more conditional than for most, at the border post. Passport photo, number, all the desired personal details do not reveal the hidden orientation, but it is written on my body, nonetheless, and my outspoken tongue must be trussed into compliance, my gestures must bend towards showing myself obliging. There are always so many 'conditions'. Fists white-knuckled in my coat pockets, I condition myself to accept these conditions, for now.

My mind wanders to Elrine, a white Afrikaans womxn I interviewed:

> *my sexuality is not something that is questioned or discussed with my parents so I do not feel safe expressing my sexuality there. That space and situation it's not suitable or acceptable at any stage to even say something about [Queerness][sic].*

She and I are conditionally welcomed and must make, or choose to make, parts of ourselves foreign to ourselves to gain access to our Afrikaans families' homes and to feel safe there. There, we can only be Queer in traces that go unnoticed to heterosexual eyes. I am at once she to whom hospitality is not extended, and she who holds the power to extend hospitality. She for whom, as a womxn, hospitality and the home space are her necessary domain. She who is told that, as a Queer womxn, there is no place for her kind in a good wholesome home. She who threatens the sanctity of marriage.
I am Queer womxn, the traveller, and the bloodline of Pieter Daniel de Wet.
Like the traveller, I am denied entry into the archive with only traces to tell my story. Yet, like the De Wets, I have a dominant narrative in the archive, as an Afrikaans womxn.
The borders between this-side and the-other('s-side)- wear thin, and blur.

"Wherever there is a door," writes Peter Melville (2003:27), "there is always a politics of reception; there is always a rule of the household which imposes upon its guests and visitors the conditions of hospitality". Consider the conditions of Afrikaner gasvryheid.*[6] I wonder about the shapes of these conditions according to which Pieter de Wet refused the traveller entry into his home. What they contain, and refuse. What are the dominant politics of reception in most conventional Afrikaner homes, according to which welcome is extended, even as gatekeeping is affirmed? The list might read something like this:

Visitors must be white, preferably Afrikaner, or at least able to speak Afrikaans.

Visitors must be heterosexual (presenting).

Visitors must have a likeness or historical affiliation to the host and/or his Afrikanerness.

Visitors who present as too different, too 'foreign', too 'other': these are potential transgressors, and are unwelcome.

And as for me: what mask should I put on in this home, the home of my sister, to receive a warm welcome and a cup of tea? What clothes should I wear 'in order' to look 'straight' enough to deserve a koeksister?*[7]What parts of myself should I leave at the welcome mat if I am going to eat melktert?

I accept the plate that is offered and quietly begin to spoon a little soft milky filling into my mouth. I find it hard to swallow. I swallow.

***6. Gasvryheid**: the Afrikaans word for hospitality, literally translated as "freedom of the guest", firstly implies a hospitality wherein the host places no limits or restraints on guests, and secondly implies that this freedom is granted by the host without reservation or condition. About the ethics of this type of unconditional hospitality, Derrida writes the following:

> Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification, whether or not it has to do with a foreigner, an immigrant, an invited guest, or an unexpected visitor, whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female. (Derrida & Dufourmantelle 2000:77)

As Melville has already alerted us, Derrida himself is clear that such unconditional hospitality, a hospitality that asks not the name of the guest, that asks not "where are you from", is impossible, since each door opens to guests only on certain conditions and each welcome is given interwoven with a politics of reception.

***7. Koeksister-**

7.1 (n.) - A plaited confectionary of the sweetest queer kind frequently served on the tables of Afrikaans homes. Made by rolling dough flat and cutting it into straight strips. Each straight strip is then further cut into three bands, still linked at the top. (Crucial: remember to keep the tops intact, otherwise everything might fall apart.) These three bands are then braided – over under across, repeat - and the loose ends are pinched in order to fashion a joint. The elaborate dough is then deep fried till crisp, and dipped in syrup. The koeksister can be winded in many ways. Some braid it, some twist it. Some do so loosely, some do so tightly. It is carried over from mother to daughter, a practice inherited by each generation that in it being inherited *differently*, queerly allows for difference despite being thought of as strictly homogenous.

The hands that braid make the dough oblique and aslant. The action of making entails turning, twisting, bending, shaping the delicacy to deviate from the straight lines into which it has been cut.

"It takes time and work to" shape and make koeksisters (Ahmed, 2006:564). "The act of" braiding the dough "has to be repeated" several times (Ahmed, 2006:564). The intimacy and warmth of the skin of the hands that are braiding bring each strip of dough to intersect with, cross, touch, rub against, be near to each of the other, where before the dough may have never touched. These hands speak a haptic language into the dough.

The koeksister is sweet on the tongue and sticks to the fingers. To the eye (my eye), a single koeksister looks like a row of glistening bums in the air, or pairs of wet, neatly-crossed legs, the girls just out of the school swimming pool and obediently lined up to hear what Miss wants them to do next.

7.2 (adj.) -Often used by South Africans as a euphemism to describe lesbians. David Gold (1995:128) notes that description of lesbians as 'koeksisters' could also be due to "the role of lips, tongue and mouth in both eating and sexual intercourse".

Gold (1995:128) also speculates that this description could owe something to the close bond of "sisters", an idea which has been appropriated to designate lesbian couples as sisters. Sara Ahmed (2006:562) notes similarly in her reading, that lesbianism "constructs the women as alike, as being like sisters". Ahmed (2006:562) continues, observing that this

> reading both avoids the possibility of lesbianism and also stands in for it, insofar as it repeats, in a different form, the construction of lesbian couples as siblings: lesbians are sometimes represented as if they have a family resemblance. The fantasy of the likeness of sisters (which is a fantasy in the sense that we search for likeness as a sign of a tie) takes the place of another fantasy, that of lesbians as being alike.[17]

Lesbians figured as sisters implies their transgressive flouting of approved sexual-social norms dictated by heteronormative society.

[17] If you wish to pause our journey together and walk with another womxn as she tells you her story, take the hand of Hester van der Walt in her memoir *Sê my, is julle twee susters?*.

4.1. The politics of Afrikaner-gasvryheid

the conditions of hospitality
are sticky with syrup
dried blood and spit
soil.

My chest is heavy and my hands tremble as I pose my questions. I am shifting in my seat and I eagerly look for moments where I can walk away from my screen and not write this. About this.

What do I say to you about the roots from which I grow? While some of them are strong and sturdy, some of them are rotting. While some blossom with flowers and fruit, some smother the plants that grow beside them and drink all the water from the soil.

Once, I looked for a rope to tie a noose around these branches,

the rope
my great grandfather
used
for toutrek.

Come and stand next to me between the pink krismis roses. Let us pry our eyes through the window of the De Wet family home, the window of my sister's home, the windows of many Afrikaner homes. The green wooden shutters creak and try to unhinge themselves and walk away. Drops of water leak from the rain gutter blotching the windowsill with black moss. On the porch, the rocking horse bobs her head in time with a restless tree. Here, we might be able to listen to the silences in the Boontjieskraal story and look for the conditions and politics of Afrikaner-gasvryheid. Perhaps the politics of the Afrikaners' own particular brand of hospitality become clear precisely through the classification of our gasvryheid as Afrikaner-gasvryheid even while these two words, as our refused traveller so long ago discovered, seem to be in an endless toutrek with one another: Afrikaner, that points to and categorises so specifically; gasvryheid that ultimately hopes for no classification, no categorisation, a wide conviviality. I note, too, that since gasvryheid is a practice that is so ingrained in my family and myself, the Afrikaners' insistence on gasvryheid is something that has intrigued me for many years. This gasvryheid is traditionally and conventionally a practice upheld by Afrikaans

womxn since we are the ones who are supposed to ensure that the domestic space is one that is welcoming and comfortable for those who are allowed to enter.

Enter.

I want to understand this cultural archive of being and behaviours. I want to stand in the kitchen next to my mother, my grandmother, her mother and hers; next to Mrs De Wet, her daughters and her grandchildren. I want to take the hand of these white Afrikaans womxn, sit at their feet and ask them, ask myself: what role has the Afrikaans womxn played in the ever-conditional Afrikaner-gasvryheid and the formation of such an exclusionary Afrikaner identity? I want to lean into and listen between the telling and retelling of the story of Boontjieskraal, the telling and retelling of the story of the Afrikaner, to the silence that is peopled by womxn. Here, I might be able to understand something of the contours of Afrikaner gasvryheid, and explore what twisted ideology Pieter held when he denied the traveller shelter, what role his wife may have played in this ideology. Here, I might be able to face my (Afrikaner) ghosts, the ghost of the traveller, (and) the ghost of the De Wet family.

4.1.1. He who stands guard at the door

First, I must meet with he who stands guard at the door, he who decides who may or may not enter the home space: the Afrikaner man. I am in the corner of the doorframe, hidden behind a spider spinning her web. I sit on her round back as she drifts down, down, down and comes to rest on that thin wire right beside Pieter's temple. The temple of Pieter Daniel de Wet. Here, as I face Pieter, his unseeing eyes are dark, set deep in his skull. But there are flashes of something, in hiding, a sudden lightning rage reflecting in his corneas. I see in him this something else, something with roots that reach back beyond the veined lids, and spread up inside his skull and go on to fester behind his ears. It is a disconcerting, amorphous thing, yet potent. Perhaps it is the fear taught to him by his father, carried in the old reliance of patriarchy and heteronormativity on the will for generational success and reproductive futurity. This is an ancient fear, a primal fear, a fear that is his but is much older than him, a fear that he is the last, and what he holds in his bones and blood and guts will wither and die with his shrivelled skin, or that it will be carved from his wife's womb and thrown to the dogs to feast on (or maybe it is a different fear?). Pieter Daniel de Wet seems afraid with an unnamed fear. Perhaps it is the

fear that there will be no patriarch to inherit the family name, no boy to inherit this family, to grow into a man of stature able to reproduce the phallic authority which The Man must properly exert over the proper Afrikaner family. As Bernard N. Fortuin (2015:71) writes:

> white masculinity in South Africa has for long been strictly regulated so as to perpetuate the well-being of the white family as primary representatives of the capitalist state. As that which constitutes and reproduces the white nation in Africa the white family attains a position of sanctification. Within this context, white men become charged with the duty to enforce their dominance over the land and its people in an attempt to safeguard the white hearth.

Thus, in that moment that I imagine Pieter Daniel de Wet, the force of history has me envisage him as a white Afrikaans man who believes he must protect his family against the perceived 'threat' of the traveller who is thought to be so other to himself . It is this same imagined fear with which the Afrikaner locks his doors and shutters his windows, the same imagined fear with which the Afrikaner builds his walls, feeds her babies in the milk from her breast, clothes her children in the morning before school; the same imagined fear with which the Afrikaner writes the laws that shape the Afrikaners' story – the fear that 'the other' will irrevocably interrupt and disrupt the reproduction of the Afrikaner 'same'. (*But perhaps it is deeper than this, with folds of skin that are queerer still, more (un)familiar, (un)knowable, (un)known than this. For more on this, turn to page B-29*)

In historical terms, the story of the Afrikaner starts with gasvryheid being extended to them, despite their receiving no invitation. In 1652, the Dutch came to South Africa as uninvited guests, landing at what they named the *Cape of Good Hope* (*We do not speak of this land's first name, we know it not).* This story is too long to tell here, and is also highly contested; it is a story that we can only ever know in part(s), depending on whose part we follow, whose part we take and whose we take apart. Those that write 'the his-story of the Afrikaner' and classify what should be included in the official record, have often "systematically rendered… 'non-white' language [and cultural] contributors… into the outer socio-political darkness" (Powell, 2007:25) and erased them from History, much like the De Wets attempted to do to the traveller. The complex relational story of 'the Afrikaner' is thus largely untraceable. What is important, for the present, is that the Afrikaner's story is one that can be characterized by an obsession with conditional gasvryheid, with deciding who is allowed in and who is not. The

story of the Afrikaner and the story of Boontjieskraal mirror each other, touch each other, spill into each other, and these parallels will be important for our journey.

Instead of living with and alongside their hosts, the native people of South Africa, the Dutch colonizers who would become Afrikaners claimed (seized, appropriated) the lands of their hosts, uprooting people and traditions and livelihoods, curtailing the cultural-generational rights of the local inhabitants and asserting the demands of the interlopers, violently re-shaping the role of guest into that of host. These were hosts who, in this betrayal, made natives into others and then held these others hostage. In turn, the hosts would be held hostage by history for their cursed misuse of gasvryheid, like De Wet family are held hostage by the traveller's curse. Haunted. Endlessly. By the weight of this violence.

Most of these colonizers were immigrants from various parts of Western Europe who "had enlisted as soldiers or sailors in [the Dutch East India] Company's service and became farming free burghers at the Cape. Few ever went back or looked back… [T]hey made the new land their own" (Giliomee, 2003:xiv). Giliomee (2003:vix) notes that "in the Western Cape almost every European family of standing owned slaves", showing the extent to which the forefathers of the Afrikaner, the forefathers of the De Wets, had subdued their erstwhile hosts, reconfiguring them as a labour resource and font of local knowledge. (I wonder how many of the traveller's kin and/or forefathers the De Wet family used in this way?) This experiential and epistemic upheaval did not happen without violence. Indigenous people understandably formed raiding bands, attacking the colonizers in order to take back what was theirs – land, stock, rights of access. In turn, colonial "commandos, made up of burghers and [bonded] Khoikhoi auxiliaries, formed the fighting force that established European control over the land and seized or recovered stolen stock. Farmers indentured the indigenous people's children and destroyed their culture" (Giliomee, 2003:xiv).

This is the story, in the briefest part. The story that passes for 'the past' and has come to be called History, handed down in pieces. And even then, with lacunae and preferences and skewed partialities.

There were fires that licked the sky grey and scorched the blood-stained earth, chasing old stories deep into the soil and into the caves of the mountains. There were iron chains that

welted ankles and wrists. There were markings on papers that numbered and sorted bodies alive and dead.

There is "no hospitality," says Derrida, without the institution of a (new) host's sovereignty which exercises and gains its power by "filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence" (Derrida quoted in Melville, 2003:91).

In the two centuries following the first Dutch landing at the Cape, groups of burghers of mixed origin had settled throughout the South African interior. For the most part, theses burghers lived isolated, almost anarchist lives and were largely self-sufficient. But by 1870 it was possible to identify "a distinct group of people that spoke Dutch, or a variant of it, shared a Christian religion and maintained [or perhaps purported to maintain?] a fair degree of racial endogamy" (Kruger, 1991:53) who could be identified as Afrikaners, and who are the forefathers of the De Wets.[*8] (Notably these forefathers to Afrikaners were described as hospitable by travelling Europeans. But even then this hospitality had its conditions and was clearly only extended to white people.)

Around the same time in the Cape, the first Afrikaner nationalist discourse begins to emerge with the establishment of the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners [Fellowship of True Afrikaners]* (Kruger, 1991:53), a fellowship that consisted primarily of white men. This curious naming of the fellowship that only includes whites as "true" Afrikaners implies that those who do not fall within this category were not seen as authentic Afrikaners. As Lou-Marie Kruger (1991:58) notes, "the absence of a distinctive ethnic discourse in the 1860s and 1870s" formed "a stark contrast" with "the strong ethnic and even nationalist sentiment articulated in an official document entitled 'Wie zijn wij?' [Who are we?], published in February 1881. The words volk and 'Afrikaner' were used very self-consciously and we also see the first traces of an invented tradition". This nationalist discourse, even in its embryonic stages, is thus marked by its intention to unite the Afrikaner volk as one big (white) family with the male at its head.

***8 "A variant of Dutch":**

It is interesting to note that few (white) historians acknowledge that this "variant of Dutch" that was spoken was not a variant of Dutch alone. Rather, even the earliest forms of Afrikaans "represent a convergence of two linguistic streams … the…varieties spoken within the Afro Asian substrate and an extraterritorial variety of Dutch" (Roberge, 2012:392). Christo Van Rensburg, (2013:2) notes that "in die geskiedenis van Afrikaans kan daar van vroeg af al (1595) taalkontak tussen Khoi en Nederlands aangetoon word" [in the history of Afrikaans, language contact between the Khoi and the Dutch can be indicated as early as 1595] (my translation). Thus, despite many historians and Afrikaner nationalists purporting Afrikaans to be an intentional structured creation of the white man, Afrikaans, like the traveller's curse and the story of Boontjieskraal was produced in a queer way, on the tongues of many unnamed people and reproduced away from the walls of institutions.

This unification of the volk excluded black and coloured forms of Afrikaans language and culture, designating these contributors unworthy of inclusion by supposedly pure Afrikaner nationalist standards. The discourse of Afrikaner national unity however virtually disappeared until 1895, despite many attempts at uniting (in effect *constructing*) the volk. In 1895 the Jameson Raid, and in 1899-1902 the South African War, inspired renewed energies towards the formation of strategic collective identity among the Afrikaner volk in rebellion against the British. These experiences of war had "indirect and longer term consequences that would prove even more important to the emergence of modern Afrikaner nationalism" (Kruger, 1991: 65).

> The South African War facilitated the articulation of a more pronounced Afrikaner nationalism. Afrikaners from different regions found a common cause in the prolonged struggle against the imperial forces, while the defeat of the republics followed by the Union brought them together within a shared polity (Kruger 1991:65).

At the risk of over-simplifying, it may be said that with the patriarchal rule of the Afrikaner under threat of the British (other), a metropolitan cultural-political superiority that ridiculed the Afrikaner, producing the Afrikaner as a debased, subaltern whiteness, a queer kind of whiteness, Afrikaners united to foster amongst themselves a sense of belonging, to keep the threat of this foreign Engelse other from undermining a volk identity (Van der Westhuizen, 2013).

The political consequences of the South African War included the defeat of the boer republics, and

> facilitated the founding of a nation state. The establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, because it focussed attention on the national political scene, made it possible for Transvalers, Cape Afrikaners etc to transcend provincial borders when they imagined an Afrikaner community (Kruger 1991:67-68).

And, as Isabel Hofmeyr (1987:21) notes, the Union and its "emphasis on white unity, citizenship, national anthem and generally its growing infrastructure of press, taxation, education and postal system, created an atmosphere propitious for the advancement of Afrikaans" and for Afrikaner unity. Despite these changes, the unity of the volk was not "a foregone conclusion" and the volk at this time "represented a diversity in class interests" (Kruger, 1991:68), meaning that any articulation of a united volk could not simply be assumed;

instead, it had to be "constructed in political struggle taking into account and transcending these intra-ethnic class divisions" (Kruger, 1991:69). Even with such sites of conceptual-political struggle, however, the express focus on the class interest of the volk alone inevitably happened at the expense of the interests of black and coloured people, in much the same way as the interests of the De Wet family, for Pieter, took precedence over the safety and lives of the coloured travelling family. This is evident from, among other things, the fact that black and coloured people were not allowed to vote. In the context of my own lineaging of the De Wets, for instance, such denial of universal suffrage in the Union ensured that white men, like Pieter, could vote in a way that would best secure their preferred racial-economic futures, the ballot being cast to ensure the prosperity of especially middle-class white people and the middle class white Afrikaans family. Indeed, it was the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie, the socio-economic class of which the De Wets formed part, who "would play a prominent part in the articulation of a nationalist discourse through the Afrikaans language movement and related developments" (Kruger, 1991:69). Thus, 1910 saw the first systematic and serious articulation of Afrikaner nationalist discourse which was "most explicitly articulated in the texts of the so-called Tweede Taalbeweging [second language movement] (started operating around 1905), the National Party (NP) (founded in 1914), the Helpmekaarbeweging [literally the "helping one another" movement] (founded in 1915), and the Afrikaner Broederbond (founded in 1918)" (Kruger, 1991:69). "The Broederbond as 'the self-chosen elite of Afrikanerdom'" restricted membership of their club to "financially sound, white Afrikaans-speaking, Protestant males over 25 years old" (Kruger, 1991:70,80). Furthermore, the second language movement consisted mostly of (white, middle-class, male) artists, writers and journalists such as Gustav Preller, Jan F E Celliers, Totius, Eugene N Marais, Louis Leipoldt, Sangiro, and Jochem van Sruggen. This literary-cultural elite worked to standardise a preferred, middle-class variant of Afrikaans, to the exclusion of working class and especially coloured idioms, mobilising language in the service of cultural unity. In terms of language unity, a 'purified' and 'standardised' Afrikaans clearly marked who would (*could* and *should*) be included in the imagined community of Afrikaner identity, and who would be relegated to the margins of inconsequence. This also implies a clear attempt by nationalists to homogenise Afrikaans, and to cull linguistic variants which to them seemed queer and inappropriate, deviant in respect of the desired norm. Isabel Hofmeyr (1987:105) notes that "to achieve such a 'civilised' discourse, Preller and others realised that Afrikaans needed massive injections of Dutch to save it from the English and 'Coloured' structures which permeated it". Such actions mirror so clearly the actions of Mr de Wet, that in his denying the travelling family, not only implied them unworthy of inclusion in

(the safety of) his Afrikaner home, and thereby the Afrikaner community, but also relegated them to the (unsafe and fatal) margins of Boontjieskraal and an Afrikaner-centric society. These actions further imply that the travelling (coloured) family would taint his home, and thereby the Afrikaner community.

Thus, instrumental in deciding what Afrikaans, Afrikanerdom and the Afrikaners' story would look like, all the relative inclusions and exclusions, were white, middle-class Afrikaner men, like Pieter. These men had a mission to construct a seemingly homogeneous identity for Afrikaners based on othering (especially) black and coloured people. Underlying this construction was the view that black and coloured people can only be "ondergeskikte deelnemers aan die oorheesende wit geskiedenis…en dat hulle bestaan slegs in terme van wit apartheid's definisies beoordeel kan word [subservient participants in the dominating white history and that their existence can only be judged in terms of white Apartheid's definitions] (Willemse 2008:31, my translation). For the most part, coloured and black communities, despite their significant, shared role in the formation of the Afrikaans language and culture, were figured as 'kindervolk', a helpless, immature, subordinate nation of children that could only be saved from themselves by regte Afrikaners (Willemse, 2008: 33).

All of which the history of entitlement brings us back, in the study, to the De Wets. Because an Afrikaner volk's delimitation and devaluation of the stories and lives of black and coloured Afrikaans people, the denial that these Afrikaans people were highly significant in the creation of Afrikaans by framing them as mere kindervolk, is reminiscent of the De Wet's denial of the traveller, and the role that the traveller's curse has played in the lives of the De Wets. It is also reminiscent of the manner in which the De Wets have attempted to refuse or delimit the impact of the curse on their lives by reducing (the value of) the story of Boontjieskraal to mere tales of gossip and 'folk story', spread by "people looking for attention", as Doreza de Wet and Uwe Kersandt (2013:291) would have it in the De Wet's recollection of the story. Yet, in the same way that the story and traveller cannot be contained by the De Wets, nationalists could not merely subsume black and coloured people into the Afrikaner's story by figuring them as children. The (queer) presence and centrality of black and coloured people in the Afrikaner's story always seems to (re)appear in the archive, haunting those who attempt to exclude it. The words, phrases, idioms, and stories that sprout from and find their roots not in Europe but in Africa, remain entangled in Afrikaans undeniably speaking to, telling of, the significance of

black and coloured people in the formation of the language. Nationalism, however, was built on attempting to deny this haunting and laying it to rest.

Prominent too in the nationalists' formation of Afrikaner identity was the Helpmekaarbeweging, a movement that was aimed toward the financial upliftment of "'poor whites" basing their charity on the threat that "poorer whites [would forget] their true, Afrikaner identity, 'losing' a 'natural' race-consciousness and assimilating with their black inferiors"(Du Toit 2003:173 quoted in Van der Westhuizen 2017:35); an assumption which positions whites as inherently worthy of having access to resources while positioning black and coloured people as inherently predisposed to, and thus worthy of, only poverty. Leaders in various organisations advocated heavily for the support of the Helpmekaar movement, especially Dr D F Malan, who "skillfully played on the slumbering ethnic sentiments of his constituency ('Niemand die zich Afrikaner noemt, mag achter blijven' / No one who calls himself an Afrikaner may stay behind)" (Kruger, 1991:79).

In effect, this was a perversely delimited form of gasvryheid. Extending a racially-biased, patriarchal form of gasvryheid was thus central to the formation of Afrikaner identity, further cementing the notion that Afrikaner-gasvryheid, was being shaped as a tool to achieve nationalist agendas. Indeed, Pieter's own extension of a racially biased form of gasvryheid through the denial of the travellers' request for shelter was equally central to the formation of his own identity as a 'true' Afrikaner since it sustains his power to extend or deny resources. It is this gasvryheid, positioned so centrally in 'Afrikaner culture' in the formation of Afrikaner Nationalism, which makes it possible for Afrikaners, like Pieter, to be seen as simultaneously gasvry (to some) and violent (to others). Indeed, tautologically, Afrikaner-gasvryheid seems often to sustain, and is sustained by, the very violence committed against those, like the traveller, who did not fit the criteria necessary to be worthy of Afrikaner-gasvryheid. It is for this reason that I so strongly question the De Wet family's defence of Pieter Daniel de Wet on the grounds of the hospitable nature that was apparently inherent to the character of the rural Afrikaner farmer. In the eyes and mind of Pieter, nationalist ideology would have positioned the travelling family as inherently unworthy of the resources, and thus the gasvryheid, the De Wets had to offer. There are extremely paradoxical constituents at work here. "Afrikaner culture," Van der Westhuizen (2017:35) explains, "was defined in middle-class terms and 'belonged to whites'. At the same time, however, precisely due to the cultural-linguistic mixing which Afrikaner constructions of 'the volk' sought to deny, this entailed a constant, fragile

process" in which "the uncertain edges of whiteness had to be assiduously protected" (Du Toit 2003:173 cited in van der Westhuizen 2017:35). What lay at the heart of Pieter's cruel decision to deny the travelling family shelter was a need to protect "the uncertain edges of whiteness." By the 1930s, The United Party, led by men, "emphasised reconciliation between the two English- and Afrikaans-speaking 'white races' on the basis of segregationism aimed at black people" (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:5-6). This version of Nationalism thus proceeded to produce more overtly black and/or coloured people as "other", made into guests in their own home, by the very host that seized the power to extend or deny them gasvryheid.

As even my short, highly selective historical account should illustrate, the resource of 'hospitality' that the Afrikaner offers is thus not necessarily his to offer and offering this resource to the (black and/or coloured) others would, perversely, also be to offer them a resource that originally belonged to their forebears and which the ways and byways of a developing Afrikaner his-story have stolen from people like the traveller. The very home from which Pieter denied the traveller shelter was not only built by the hands of the travellers' ancestors, but also built on land stolen from the travellers' forebears. The act of denying \and extending gasvryheid further (re)inscribes this power relation - the guest is continually (re)inscribed as the one requesting help, and the host is continually (re)inscribed as the one with the power and resources to give help, or to retract it. Pieter, denying the traveller shelter, therefore seeks to ensure that he and those like him always stand in the house while the traveller always stands outside requesting shelter, always at the mercy of Pieter (and those like him). In the De Wet family version of history, even the description of Pieter as inherently hospitable is painted with underlying tones of paternalism that implies the childlike nature of the subjects to which he denies or extends gasvryheid (Willemse 2008:34). "The act of hospitality is not only born out of an opposition between guest and host," writes Melville (2003:25, my italics) "but also it can never overcome this disparity without guaranteeing it - simply by acting, by bestowing upon the guest a generosity from *a place of privilege*". Paradoxically, the separation and isolation of the Afrikaner volk in the attempt to establish their identity was underscored by a need to keep this imagined collective pure, and "purify society", as described in the Afrikaner Broederbond constitution, through "old pure morals and characteristics, such as hospitality, democratic conviviality, and readiness and generosity to stand by each other in bitterness or need" (Serfontein quoted in Kruger, 1991:83). Such convoluted vocabularies of authenticity and culture unadultered, of purity, isolation and necessary separation or 'apartheid', could easily imply an insecurity in and subsequent need to affirm the Afrikaner's purity. What it also

implies is that impurities exist outside the boundaries of Afrikaner identity that threaten the Afrikaner's imagined 'purity', and that to such 'impurities' the category of "old pure morals and characteristics" should not be extended. Indeed, the very isolation and separation from, (around and through) which the Afrikaner identity is constructed, were and are fuelled by a fear of the (perceived and/or imagined) threat that the (variable) Other poses to the Afrikaner family. What becomes clear as we walk along the pages and paths of Afrikaner history, is that this fear resulted in an obsession with racial purity and "race became an issue that has all the hallmarks of clinical obsession" (Powell, 2007:25). Yet what is strange about this obsession with racial purity is that the Afrikaner's language and racial heritage is clearly characterized by and made up of a mixing pot of both African and European cultures. Thus, perhaps Pieter's fear, and by extension the Afrikaner's fear, is deeper than simply fearing that 'the other' will disrupt the reproduction of the Afrikaner 'same'. Perhaps Pieter looked into the eyes of the traveller, whom he had marked as undesirable, and saw himself, his own cultural queerness and the muddled queerness of his people. Indeed, as Ivor Powell (2007:25) notes, the Afrikaner's fear is premised on "the ambivalences in [our] own history", the knowledge that our origins are not 'pure' and cannot be categorised and marked. Such permeability, in a volk logic, makes separations, determined boundaries, and assertive refusals necessary. The real story of our origins and heritage elides containment and categorisation much like the (queer) narrative form of the traveller's story. Acknowledging this ambivalence, this inability to be classified, that runs in our veins is admitting that the initial reproduction of the Afrikaner's race and language are far queerer in shape and form than what was purported by the architects of Afrikaner Nationalism.[*9] (see **Notes on queerness and the archive** for a clarification of how I use the term queer). It is thus the fear of just how queer we are (through our 'deviation' from the European 'norm' in our originary racial 'impurity') that informed the racial obsession, and thus the obsession with conditional gasvryheid, which underlies the project of shaping the Afrikaner identity. "The alleged ethnic coherence and racial homogeneity of Afrikanerness" as Thomas Blaser and Christi van der Westhuizen (2012:381, my italics) explain, "was discursively constructed from the *social*

***9 The queer shape of the history of the Afrikaner('s) (*gasvryheid*):**

Marleen van Niekerk's (2008) article *Die Etende Afrikaner*, published in *Van Volksmoeder tot Fokofpolisieksar*, a collection of critical essays on Afrikaans places of remembrance, notes how even the origin of traditional Afrikaner food like "smoorsnoek, vissop, bokkoms, bredies, sosaties, kerries, geelrys met rosyne, atjar, sambal en blatjang" can never be traced as purely Dutch or purely a result of the influence of Malay slaves. But rather that these traditional Afrikaner dishes are a result of the combination of food from these two worlds. This is particularly interesting since food forms such a key part of gasvryheid. Indeed, it becomes clearer and clearer that without black and coloured people, Afrikaner gasvryheid, and the story of the Afrikaner would not exist.

diversity found among Afrikaans-speakers and *reproduced through careful policing of boundaries*" pointing to an entrenched predisposition that Afrikaners could only "realise, maintain, and protect their cultural identity through separation and isolation" (Griessel & Kotze, 2012:5). Indeed, as Van der Westhuizen (2017:4, my italics) notes, "the 'Afrikaner' identity was historically forged in reaction to white Afrikaans-speakers' status of *being marked as just-about-white in relation to hegemonic whiteness*". The so-called "old pure morals and characteristics" through which 'society would be purified' could thus only be extended to those who did not 'threaten' to expose the queerness at the heart of Afrikaner identity, and thus the Afrikaner nuclear family. The De Wet family, as an Afrikaner family, can only be family when the doors remain locked and the windows remain shuttered against the outsiders (who are always already insiders).[18]

4.1.2. She who waits, listening in the quiet inner room.

A discourse that is often only spoken of in hushed tones (or, as in the story of Boontjieskraal, not spoken of at all) is the role that Afrikaner womxn, and more specifically the volksmoeder identity, played (whether or not they were told to, shaped to, or/and chose to play these roles) in formation of an 'Afrikaner' volk. And thus also the role they played in the caring, building of unity, and inclusion and exclusion that formed the Afrikaner volk.[19] This is of particular of importance for our journey together because while the Afrikaner man often stands at the door as gatekeeper deciding to whom Afrikaner-gasvryheid is to be extended (*I have met with him, yet he avoids my gaze*), upholding Afrikaner-gasvryheid and its material performance is most often assigned to the Afrikaner womxn, the volksmoeder and, by proxy, those she assigns as her helpers. Indeed, while we may hear little from or about Mrs De Wet in most of the (re)tellings of the story of Boontjieskraal, hers is not an innocent or uncomplicated silence since she is the biological (and often even ideological) reproducer of the De Wet family. While the

[18] David Goldblatt's first photographic collection *Some Afrikaners Revisited* (2007), shows the ways in which those who people this collective called 'The Afrikaner' never quite fit into the lines that Afrikaner nationalists had drawn in their imagining of an Afrikaner identity. The essays by both Antjie Krog and Ivor Powell in this collection also convey the anxiety that Afrikaner nationalists felt in reaction to Goldblatt's work, since *Some Afrikaners* exposed the queer way in which many Afrikaners looked quite different from the middle-class, polished image of the Afrikaner that these nationalists wanted portrayed.

[19] If the narrative and history of the meaning of the volksmoeder is a topic that interests you, take a moment to pause our journey and walk with Lou-Marie Kruger (1991) through her PhD entitled *Gender, Community And Identity: Women And Afrikaner Nationalism In The Volksmoeder Discourse Of Die Boerevrou (1919-1931),* and/or walk with Christi van der Westhuizen (2017) through her *Sitting Pretty: White Afrikaans Women in Postapartheid South Africa.*

traveller may have cursed the men in the De Wet family, it is the De Wet womxn who are the bearers of the sons whom he cursed. More than being the biological reproducers of the De Wet bloodline, the De Wet womxn, like other Afrikaner womxn, also reproduced nationalist ideology by teaching it to their children in the home space. It is also important to complicate her silence since Afrikaner womxn have often been portrayed as silent and helpless bystanders to Afrikaner nationalism and its precursors. Mrs De Wet's silence can thus easily be read as upholding the image that Afrikaner womxn were helpless, silent victims. To let her silence go unnoticed and read it as uncomplicated is to deny her agency and confirm that she must be protected by Pieter from the 'threat' that the traveller poses to her and her children. However, it cannot be this simple. Isabel Hofmeyer (1987:112) identifies "the domesticated space of home", the domain assigned to womxn, "as key to the construction of a racialised, Afrikaans cultural-political subjectivity" as this is the space where Afrikaner culture is transmitted from mother to child and the Afrikaner nation is biologically reproduced. Here, in the four walls of Mrs De Wet's kitchen, I sit, crossed-legged, in the company of Lou-Marie Kruger, Christi van der Westhuizen, and other Afrikaner womxn who, like myself, draw the helm over their eyes and look in-between the past and present, listening to hear the grammars of silence.

Pre-1900, literature on the Afrikaans womxn was scarce. The writing that does exist describes domestic life but "there were hardly any serious attempts to understand who the Afrikaans woman was and little attempt to tell her who she should be. Most of the accounts were quite positive" (Kruger, 1991:104). Yet, Afrikaners, while often painted and perceived as primarily a masculinist culture and community, had strong matriarchal features which signals to me that Mrs De Wet may have played a far more prominent (and culpable) role in the De Wet home and the Boontjieskraal story than her silence would have us believe. These matriarchal features are evident through the manner in which, for example, womxn often spurred their men to fight in the South African War; this despite womxn having little to no public political involvement in this conflict. While the men were fighting in the war, the farm duties and the household duties fell on the shoulders of the womxn. Before the war, there may have been some gendered division of labour, with the womxn confined to the domestic space, but during the war, the womxn took on almost all responsibility in the absence of their husbands and sons (Kruger 1991). In the time after the South African War, "the predominant notions of the 'Boer women'" writes Van der Westhuizen (2013:245) "were as tough, self--sufficient survivors in a harsh environment where they continued to preserve [imagined] racial purity". The agency is extremely knotty. Consider that during the war, many womxn and children were killed and

suffered greatly in concentrations camps, yet Kruger (2008:120) notes that many womxn wrote about their experience of the war recounting not only the suffering they endured, but also recounting the active part they had in the war as soldiers, spies, letter writers, supporters and even "boelies van Britte [bullies to the Brits]". She notes that these womxn played an active role in the creation of a very specific image of themselves: "Deur wat hulle onthou en oorvertel het, en ook deur wat hulle vergeet en verswyg het, het vroue, wat hulleself ook deurgaans as skaam en beskeie uitbeeld, aktief deelgeneem aan die konstruksie van hulle eie identiteit as vroue van die boere of boervroue [Through what they remembered and recounted, and through what they forgot and withheld, womxn, who also represented themselves as shy and reserved throughout, actively took part in the construction of their own identity as the womxn of boere or boerewomxn.](Kruger, 2008:122, my translation). This logic would dictate that Mrs De Wet may have taken part quite actively in the framing of herself as quiet and vulnerable to the so-called threat the travellers posed. In fact, such a framing would have perversely motivated Mr De Wet's rejection of the travellers. In the eyes of Afrikaner nationalists, perhaps this framing would even justify Mr de Wet's cruel decision. The suffering of womxn like Mrs De Wet was held up to the nation as an ideal for all womxn to strive towards and stood "as a symbol of martyrdom for the cause of the nation" (Kruger, 1991:139). The womxn's role in Afrikaner identity was cast as 'service to the nation' even at the cost of herself, and evidently that service also entailed aiding and abetting the exclusion and violence committed to keep the Afrikaner *volk* "pure". In memory of these womxn, the Vrouemonument was erected and unveiled on 16 December 1913, the date of the battle of the Ncome River, or also known as "die slag van Bloedrivier"[20], now known as Reconciliation day. This was an opportunity not only to honour the womxn and children who suffered in the war, but also to unite Afrikaners (Kruger, 1991). The war thus had a measurable, if indirect, impact upon masculinity. Womxn led households, and stood as the heroines of the nation and volk - an ideological stature potentially threatening the patriarchal authority. Unsurprisingly, nationalists then sought to redirect womxn to their assigned categories and roles within the Afrikaner volk. Van der Westhuizen (2013:245) notes that

> [w]hile the women continued to agitate for independence, the Boer leadership – convinced of surrender – reassigned them from heroines to vulnerable victims in need of protection, while promising men reinstated paternalist authority. The rearticulation positioned the defeated *volk*

[20] The battle of Blood River

> as feminised and the men as having to reassume patriarchal authority, while the women and the feminised language (mother tongue) became symbols for the fledgling *volk*.

What should become evident is that through the developments of capitalism and industrialisation, alongside the abovementioned rearticulation of masculinity, the (Afrikaner) womxn's place in the household was once again increasingly confined to that of mother, care-giver, nurturer, and home-maker, a more singularly emphatic role "displacing the actual variance in femininities" (Van der Westhuizen, 2017: 246). In my own (re)visiting of the De Wets, the traveller, and the Boontjieskraal his/story, this configuration of the womxn's role complicates Mrs De Wet's relation to the travelling family. Pieter, in denying the travelling family shelter, not only sentenced the traveller to death but the traveller's wife and children too. As I see it, Mrs De Wet, constructed as mother, care-giver, and nurturer, putatively shares these identities with the traveller's wife and, based on this sameness, Mrs De Wet could possibly have protested Pieter's decision to deny the travelling family shelter. And yet she did not. The values that are central to the role she is given (which is simultaneously the role she has chosen) as mother, nurturer, or care-giver, would run counter to Pieter's decision to sentence children and a mother to death. But it is the specific role as volksmoeder given to Afrikaner womxn that does not allow for such a simple reading. The Afrikaner womxn was not being construed as some archetypal mother figure ready to serve as nurturer of all children. Rather, her signifying role was specifically to be the mother of the volk, to reproduce the white Afrikaner volk, to care for the Afrikaner volk. Her function was to embody, as if by nature, the twisted nurture of the Afrikaner volk in which lay the generative force not only of individual Afrikaner families, but the cultural volk family of The Afrikaner. And it is at this stage that it becomes clearer and clearer why the Afrikaner womxn is so central to understanding Afrikaner-gasvryheid.

Mrs De Wet's relationship to the traveller's wife also stretches beyond their sameness as mothers. Kruger (1991) notes that much of white womxn's work in the home was outsourced to black and coloured womxn who were domestic workers in Afrikaner homes. "Domestic workers were present in households in all classes of society… [and] while it freed women in the working class to work outside the home, for women of the middle class" (Kruger, 1991:122) Belinda Bozolli (1981:23) adds that it "grants their positions as wives and mothers a certain status". Thus these middle class womxn became "the managers of labour rather than the performers" of labour (Bozzoli, 1981:23). The centrality of black and coloured domestic

workers to the Afrikaner home complicates the nationalists' purported intention to keep the Afrikaner volk 'pure' since domestic workers often cooked, cleaned, and raised the children. They were thus let into the most intimate parts of Afrikaner homes, working to ensure that the Afrikaner womxn could perform and uphold Afrikaner-gasvryheid.

This strange space, this outsider-inside position, that domestic workers occupied, was (and still is) further striated by the fact that they were given new names that could supposedly be 'pronounced more easily by Afrikaner tongues'. But this act speaks to a far more pernicious underlying intention than the inability to pronounce their names: this renaming was(is) an attempt to empty them of their identities and brand them with a new identity that Afrikaners could more readily control (turn to Section E: **The Heaped Bones of August** where you will find me exploring the power of naming and categorising). They were (and still are) not seen as womxn with their own identities, often reduced only to their position as domestic workers, despite occupying such a central role in the intimate spaces of the Afrikaner home. They have thus been produced as present absences and absent presences that haunt the 'purity' that the Afrikaner nationalists strove for.[21]

I suspect that
Mrs De Wet
had servants
black and coloured
that performed
labour to run
her household
labour to keep
her household
in place.

She would likely have 'enjoyed' a fraught relationship with such womxn, 'her' 'servants'. In supporting her husband Pieter De Wet in refusing access to the travelling family, she would then further have been enacting existing strategies through which she habitually, in terms of custom, rendered womxn who looked like the travelling family to dis/appear, as needed or as not, as present absences within the De Wet family home.

[21] Ena Jansen's chapter in *Van Volksmoeder tot Fokofpolisiekar* (2008), "Thandi, Katrina, Meisie, Maria, ou-Johanna, Christina, ou-Lina, Jane en Cecilia Magadlela" explores the remembering and forgetting of domestic workers in Afrikaner homes and the role of Afrikaner womxn in that.

Alongside the central role domestic workers played, the mechanisation of many domestic duties, "the decrease in home production," due to the spread of commodity production, and "the introduction of public education" (Kruger, 1991:127) freed up white middle-class Afrikaner womxn's time. Ironically, this apparent 'freedom' also "robbed [white] women of much of the status and fulfilment they enjoyed as participants in home production and as sole educators of their children" (Kruger, 1991:127). Many working class womxn, however, continued to enter the labour market to support their families financially, a factor that Kruger (1991:130) notes made it necessary for male "nationalist ideologues to formulate a clearer position regarding women". She remarks that womxn's role as workers outside the home made it possible for them to question male authority more easily and stand in as role models challenging the traditional assumption that womxn were inferior to men intellectually. The nationalists responded by using post-war literature that invoked the trauma of Afrikaner womxn to rally the volk and unite them around the image of the suffering womxn: rather the Afrikaner womxn as pained victim than female agent potentially independent of the workings of 'The Volk'. It is based on this pained victim image of the Afrikaner womxn that Afrikaner men could strengthen the so-called paternalistic nature of Afrikaner culture by portraying themselves as "heldhaftige ridder[s] wat tot hulle[vrouens] se redding kon kom. [heroic horseman that could come to their womxn's rescue]" (Van Robbroeck, 2008:131, my translation). This paternalistic ideal that Afrikaner men needed to protect Afrikaner womxn and children (especially against the so-called savages and souties),[22] was central to nationalist ideology. This need to protect the 'pure', 'helpless' Afrikaner womxn, mother and child, I suspect, may be part of what drove Pieter to turn away the traveller. What this speaks to once again, however, is the need to ensure that the Afrikaner volk is not infiltrated or disrupted by the other (even the (m)other within), and that the Afrikaner man is not replaced and usurped by a black, coloured, or British man. Today still, as Van der Westhuizen (2018) observes, "the highest price that the Afrikaner womxn pays… [if she] dares to break the rule of white reproduction… is expulsion from the home… because as an Afrikaner womxn you are supposed to only reproduce white children". From such a womxn, the privileges of gasvryheid are rescinded. Thus, Afrikaner-gasvryheid was (and still is) employed as a tool to not only ensure that the boundaries of Afrikanerdom were (are) protected, but that the boundaries and

[22] Derogatory term used by Afrikaners to refer to the British, literally translated to 'salties'. Some say Afrikaners called the British this name due to the derogatory myth that the British were 'piele' – dicks – dipped in the sea. Others say Afrikaners called the British this because the British, figuratively, have one foot on the African continent and the other on Great Britain and subsequently their dicks hang in the ocean.

categories that exist within Afrikaner culture remain intact since without such imagined coherence and impermeability, the agenda of Afrikaner Nationalism could not succeed. When reading the Boontjieskraal story through this lens, it becomes clear that Pieter's rejection was also motivated by a will to keep even his wife within the boundaries she had been assigned.

However, womxn often blurred the lines within which they were confined, even while still marking the categories to which they had been assigned. Around 1905, many middle-class white Afrikaner womxn were becoming involved in social welfare work via the establishment of Die Suid-Afrikaanse Vroue Federasie (South African Women's Federation or SAVF), an organisation of womxn that worked towards raising funds to uplift the (white Afrikaans) community. This can be read as a public extension of gasvryheid, albeit also marked by limits and borders. Notably, despite having an inclusive name that purports to include all South African womxn, SAVF did not offer membership to black or coloured womxn. For the most part, their policies were relatively 'inclusive' but, even if unofficially, they were politically aligned to Afrikaner Nationalism by promoting the interests of General Botha of the Het Volk party (later the South African party) (Kruger, 1991). Even this affiliation was fraught. While the SAVF originally, around 1905, held sentiments that reflected a deliberate political orientation, and while General Botha had, earlier, in 1906, displayed significant interest in womxn's suffrage, at "the 1913 sitting of parliament, he said in his capacity as Prime Minister that women were not ready for the vote and that if it was offered to them they would refuse it" (Kruger, 1991:153). This change in attitude notably occurred alongside the split in his party and the establishment of the National Party in 1914. Two years later, the SAVF formally declared that they would restrict their involvement expressly to social welfare, withdrawing from all political activity. The ideological implication, of course, is that they erroneously conceptualised social welfare as apolitical. Kruger (1991:154) notes however that this is a false conclusion, for the SAVF's "concern with welfare activities was actually not apolitical at all", but cannily tautological, since this social welfare work, indeed the gasvryheid of these womxn, worked to uplift only those who fell in line with what Afrikaner nationalists saw as worthy of gasvryheid: white Afrikaners. Thus, the work of these womxn continued to refuse shelter to those who looked like the traveller and thus continued the lineage of violence against the traveller. This makes it all the more clear why the travellers' story continued and continues to haunt Afrikaners and why such a haunting is necessary. The haunting reminds us that the violence the travellers experienced continues. It also highlights why the intention behind the

travellers' curse, which was to end the lineage of the De Wets and thereby end the reproduction of the social *as is*, remains necessary and relevant long after the travellers' material death.

An explicit resurgence of womxn's public involvement in political affairs came about with the national establishment of the womxn's branch of the National Party, namely the Nationale Vroue Party (NVP) in 1923. General Hertzog, then leader of the NP, expediently granted the franchise to womxn in the 1930s in order "to shore up the white vote," a tactical move which affirmed that "women's political rights hinged on utility to volk and race" (Van der Westhuizen 2013:247). Once the female franchise was endowed, the NP insisted on absorbing the specific *womxn's* branch of the National Party, and with the disappearance of the NVP, the Afrikaner womxn disappeared from the public political sphere once again. "The *volksmoeder* discourse that permitted political engagement," writes Van der Westhuizen (2013:247), "had been re-adapted to re-direct white Afrikaans-speaking women away from politics and the labour market to the domestic sphere". This is perhaps another factor that underpins the continued framing of Mrs De Wet as a silent and innocent party in the Boontjieskraal story. Since this frames the Afrikaner womxn as uninvolved directly in politics, she would be perceived as equally uninvolved in the decision to deny the traveller shelter. Indeed, in the retellings of the story of Boontjieskraal, the framing of Mrs De Wet as an innocent and quiet bystander *supports* nationalist agendas that aimed to relegate womxn to the domestic sphere. However, even this confinement must be complicated.

During the late 1920s, fewer young working-class Afrikaner womxn entered the labour market but some middle-class womxn, the daughters of Mrs De Wet for instance, were able to use the skills they learnt in their charity work toward remuneration. They were, however, still confined to "'feminine' jobs due to their 'nurturing skills', i.e. nursing and teaching" (Van der Westhuizen, 2013:249). I would venture to say that their role in society was to extend gasvryheid (with its racialized conditions), and manage how gasvryheid could be extended from within the home outwards to public spheres beyond the familiar, with the intention of building the Afrikaner nation as a family. (Pertinent, here, of course, is that the Afrikaner womxn's gasvryheid was only extended in keeping with hegemonic cultural-political limits, rather than applying to all. In other words, it was *bonded* to the National Party agenda, and thus *bounded* and boundaried.) Again, Afrikaner womxn were continuing the violence of the De Wets, their foremothers and their forefathers, against those like the traveller through this extension of gasvryheid.

This extension of gasvryheid (always with its racialized conditions) had the specific purpose of, among other things, claiming these spheres for the Afrikaner in a different way than what the NP had done. Where once before Afrikaner womxn reproduced the Afrikaner nation biologically and taught nationalist ideology to their children in the home space alone, they now also reproduced nationalist ideology in spheres, like nursing and education, which were made into extensions of the domestic, extensions of the home space. Afrikaner womxn were making these spheres homely and thus safe for the Afrikaner, to the exclusion of black and coloured people. The extension of conditional gasvryheid in these spheres functioned to strengthen the Afrikaner volk¸ the Afrikaner nuclear family, and the Afrikaner individual that functioned within these units, at the cost of the other. As Van der Westhuizen (2013:249) writes, "the home was displaced as a 'key Afrikaner nationalist base' for defensive nation-building to instead become 'a focus for the display of newfound prosperity'". Gasvryheid to and by the Afrikaner was in some sense one of the political agendas of the day. "When the Afrikaner nationalist state took the war against the Swart Gevaar [Black Peril] and the Rooi Gevaar [Red Peril] across 'the border' in the late 1960s," militantly enforcing who may receive gasvryheid from the Afrikaner who held all resources, "women were instructed by Afrikaner nationalist men to 'stand together' with 'their' men" writes Van der Westhuizen(2013:249). She continues quoting Andre Brink (in Van der Westhuizen, 2013:249), saying Afrikaner womxn were instructed to be "guardians of the inner room that listen with an intuitive ear to the deepest stirrings of a volk". This is a practice still at work today in large and small scale as the Afrikaner womxn silently works away performing gasvryheid by keeping the home presentable and enjoyable for special guests, while the men sit around the fire or dinner table talking about politics. Thus, while Afrikaner-gasvryheid was being used to assert the boundaries of Afrikanerdom, it is and was also used to ensure that even Afrikaners (and especially Afrikaner womxn) remain confined to their assigned categories within Afrikaner culture and that spilling from these categories is never an option. "If one stitch of the volksmoeder prescriptions come undone," Van der Westhuizen (2017:200) confirms, "the whole pattern can start to fray and subjects can interrogate and resist both heteropatriarchal and racist injunctions". The very gasvryheid the Afrikaner womxn extends can only work based on her exclusion from certain spheres. As Van der Westhuizen (2017:200) observes, "white Afrikaans women are objectified and rendered equivalent to the black other *and* to the animal other, with concomitant violence, if they fail to submit to the demands of white Afrikaans men who pursue normative or hegemonic masculinity".

Womxn simultaneously chose to be and were coaxed into becoming present absences, absent presence, quietly working to expand the Afrikaner nationalist agenda by ensuring the family dynamic closely resembles the imagined shapes (with their boundaries, and borders) envisaged by the architects of Afrikaner nationalism. In the same way, Mrs De Wet and her daughters and granddaughters may have chosen to frame Mrs De Wet as a quiet bystander despite her obvious involvement since this framing ensures that their narrative is in alignment with nationalist precepts. This framing ensures that Mrs De Wet's difference is (re)framed as deference, a difference concealed by silence. As Van der Westhuizen (2017:104) highlights, "modernity involves a 'narrative of the nation' that conceals disparities such as gender, class, race, and 'stitches up such deep internal divisions and differences' into a family of the nation". Within Afrikaner Nationalism, "different identities or particularities are strung together to construct a hegemonic formation" wherein "nationality subsumes or expels differences to *present* itself as uniform" (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:104, my italics). And it is toward this end that gasvryheid is often used as a tool that continues not only to try to police the boundaries of and within the white Afrikaans family but also wants to ensure that within that family various individuals continue to fulfil and perform their assigned role to ensure that the self can subsume and exclude the other (even the internal other). Thus, Pieter's Afrikaner-gasvryheid, and even the De Wets framing of Pieter in their account of the story, attempts to ensure that Mrs De Wet and those like her, those like me, are mere silent actors in Pieter and the Afrikaner man's gasvryheid. Nationalism's formation of Afrikaner-gasvryheid seems therefore to place even those who are tasked with performing it into categories in which they do not always fit. And it is this formation of gasvryheid that labours to ensure that the boundaries between the traveller and the De Wets continue to exist. Those who do not fulfil and perform our role in Afrikaner-gasvryheid, and refuse to be co-opted into its strict categories, threaten to expose the queerness that exists so centrally *within* the Afrikaner identity. "Dissident subjects," Van der Westhuizen (2017:199) affirms, "succeed in exposing that, while the 'Afrikaner' exterior…might suggest its contents are homogen[e]ous, it is predicated upon repetitive internal differentiation and hierarchisation". Queer Afrikaner figures, like myself, are thus often pushed to the margins (of Afrikanerdom) and (some of) the privileges of gasvryheid are withdrawn from us (turn to **Met die Helm Gebore** where you will find me exploring these margins.)

I am in Namibia. It's Sunday and we are visiting the Van der Merwes,[23] a family that is part of my sister's congregation (this is a home much like Naretha Pretorius'[10] home). We walk in through the front door; all the older men greet the womxn with a kiss on the mouth. I have never met these men but they kiss me on the mouth too as if we met donkie jare terug.[24] My sister looks me in the eye. I cannot tell if she is concerned for me or if she is warning me not to protest.[25] The men greet each other with firm hand-shakes and deep affirmations: "Broer". We take our assigned seats in the voorkamer. This is where dominee and other white guests are greeted and entertained. But my sister and the other womxn do not remain seated in the* voorkamer; *they are moving from the voorkamer to the kitchen making sure the food is being prepared as per the instructions of Leandri, the womxn of the house. Every time my sister returns to the* voorkamer, *she lingers for a while beside her husband, and before she leaves again, she rests her hand on my shoulder. I know that she wants me to help in the kitchen. Not because they need help, simply because this is how the game is played and I am breaking the rules. But I stay, breathing in between pairs of broad two-tone khaki shoulders that shift ever so slightly away from me, intrigued by the curious way we segregate ourselves, intrigued by the secret conversations the men are having. After someone called Andre finishes a long story about hunting in the Karoo, punctuated with "Ja nees" and a punchline at the end, we move to the dining room. This is where dominee and other white guests have lunch. Leandri brings in the dishes prepared by Myrtle, their domestic worker. Lunch starts with Leandri's husband praying: "Seën Here die voedsel en so ook die hande wat dit voorberei*[26] *het en maak ons opreg dankbaar daarvoor. Amen."*[27] *While he prays, my father and I smile at each other. We eat from fine china plates and silver polished knives and forks. She has inherited these from her*

***10 Onthaal Onthul**

Naretha Pretorius is a South African artist who explores the inner workings of (her own) Afrikaner culture through an exhibition entitled *Onthaal Onthul.* She writes that "'Onthaal' means to welcome people. An 'Onthaal' can refer to a social occasion where friends, acquaintances or a community gather to celebrate a festive event. 'Onthaal' can also refer to a formal function or reception, which is conducted and structured according to strictly prescribed protocols and etiquette. 'Onthul' is to reveal something, to point something out, to disclose or to expose something. It can also mean to lay bare one's heart" (Pretorius, 2011). Poetry from this exhibition are intertwined with my own work as a means of showing some of the ways other Afrikaner womxn are navigating the complex matrixes of Afrikaner-gasvryheid.

[23] All names used in this scene are pseudonyms.
[24] A phrase that is literally translated as "donkey years ago" and refers to very long ago.
[25] Once, I did protest, but my protests fell on deaf ears. We never spoke of this again.
[26] I wonder whose hands he is praying for.
[27] Translation: Lord, bless the food we are about to have and so too the hands that prepared it and make us sincerely thankful for it. Amen.

***11. Teaspoons**

The teaspoons are arranged
in rows like the
congregation sitting
neatly in the pews.
The congregation that follows
the same sacraments
year in and year out.

Dozens of white teaspoons.
Decades pure and clean
fine and feminine,
fitting perfectly in
their wooden boxes.

All aligned
the teacup ears are turned
politely in the same direction.
The teaspoon tongues, alike, comply.

Over decades the sisters in the church
set every Sunday
dozens of teacups
dozens of saucers
dozens of teaspoons
dozens of koeksisters
dozens of pancakes
dozens of vetkoeke

The sisters also
wash
dry
pack
make
bake
take
the dozens of dozens
a dozen times countless over
over and over

(A re-working of Pretorius, 2011)

grandmother. Everyone compliments Leandri on how lovely the food is. After dinner, we return to the voorkamer *for tea. "Every Sunday the 'sisters'… serve the congregation tea./ Every Sunday the 'brothers'… meet and deliberate"* (Pretorius, 2011). *Once everyone has left the dining room, Myrtle clears the plates and washes them in the scullery. Leandri brings a tray to the* voorkamer *prepared by Myrtle. On the tray, there are carefully arranged teaspoons*[11], fine china cups and saucers, and doilies*[12]. She has inherited these from her grandmother. We drink our tea and eat our melktert and koeksisters with the familiar sound of the teaspoon on the saucer keeping the polite smiles company. Myrtle is finished in the scullery. Leandri dishes food for her in a plastic plate. She leaves through the back door to her separate room, set apart from the house*[13]. And inside the farmers are talking about how well they treat their farmworkers. "Elke jaar gee ons vir hulle 'n skaap of 'n sak mielies"[28] says a man named Jan. "Ja weet jy, dis belangrik dat ons omsien na die volkies[29]. Ons gee maar elke jaar ook van ons ou klere vir hulle. Hulle leef mos in sulke moeilike omstandighede. Maar ou Florence is al deel van ons familie vir jare, die kinders sien haar al as 'n tweede ma. Ek weet nie hoe ek sonder haar sou*

***12. Doilies**

Dress / Manner
Dress is the way we wear our clothes,
a mode of fashion.
Manner is the way we behave ourselves,
a code of conduct.

The doilies,
like
the women,
neat,
fine,
decorated,
smart,
and well mannered.

Court shoes, stockings and church hats,
handbags, brooches, and gloves,
were the mode.

Legs crossed, hands folded, and the tissue, held tightly.

Cultivated, subservient, and innocent.
Pretty-pretties
proudly
according to etiquette
all dressed up,
this was the code.
(Pretorius, 2011)

[28] Translation: Every year we give them a sheep or a bag of corn.
[29] A term used by some Afrikaners to refer to people of colour. This term is infantilising since it is a diminutive.

klaar kom nie"[30] *his wife affirms. They both look at me while they speak. And this how we arrange ourselves and calculate our gestures.* [31]

***13 Her separate room, set apart from the house**

From Pretorius (2011) "The Children: My Childhood":

My congregation was white.
My schools were white.
My community was white.
Except for our servants living
separately in their servant quarters.

As a child, I accepted all this as normal.
As a child, I was oblivious to what was happening in my country.
As a child, I did not understand 'Apartheid'.
My family never said the word.

But I wondered ...

Why did our servants use separate toilets?
Why did our servants use separate plates and mugs?

I was curious...

I visited our servant and her children.
I realised why they smelled of smoke.
They prepared their food on an open fire using a three-legged cast iron pot**.
At some point, I decided to no longer use the word 'kaffir',
although it was commonly used in my community.
But my awareness went no further…

So, my story is not of state brutality and murder.
That wasn't part of my frame of reference.
My memories are almost only of contentment and harmony*.

Then in 1994, my national identity shifted.
The Afrikaners became suddenly a political minority.
In 1995, my father passed away.
The patriarch, the iron fist, died.
All of this, gave me good reason to question
my origins, my history, my beliefs and my value system.

My study journey has allowed for my personal narrative
to meet with the socio-political master narrative.
The master narrative of inequality.

"What did it mean, and would it have meant for me, to be a woman
in a conservative Afrikaner Calvinistic patriarchal system?"

This relationship with my history, is bittersweet.
The happy memories of my childhood innocence are sweet.
The critique of the socio-political master narrative is bitter.

**A three-legged cast iron pot used to be called a 'kaffir pot'.

When the evening grows tired and night falls, quietly I sit alone outside on the stoep, back against the white chalked walls. There is a sour smell in the air that turns the corners of my mouth and clings to my nostrils. Something rancid haunts the vocabularies of this gasvryheid, *breathing with rotten sighs in between the words arranged as an ethics of welcome. The lights are dimmed, the candles burn low, the coal stove is filling the rooms with smoke. I cannot bear it. This half-life. The polite setting down of the teaspoon on the saucer. The weighted silences. Cannot bear the "jammer" and "ag shame" and whispered judgements dressed in doilies. "Stille waters, diepe grond, onder draai die duiwel rond," Mr De Wet whispers in my ear.*[32] *"Saggies praat is duiwelsraad,"*[33] *I reply. My feet are weary, dirt-matted blood dries on my soles. I have scratched patches in my scalp; my mouth is dry, my eyes strain and my ears ring as I listen for a whiff in the wind that will lead me. Inside me, something is still shifting, and sliding, causing friction. I cannot stop walking. I must shift and slide with myself.*

[30] Translation: You know, it's important that we look after them. Every year we also give them some of our old clothes. They live in such difficult conditions. But old Florence has been part of our family for so many years the children even think of her as a second mother. I don't how I would get by without her.
[31] This scene is also inspired by observations made about Afrikaners by Christi van der Westhuizen (2018) in personal communication with her.
[32] Afrikaans idiom directly translated as: Still waters run deep, and that is where the devil roams. Implies that quiet people or silence often have mysterious and hidden depths in which the work of the devil is concocted.
[33] Afrikaans idiom directly translated as: Whispering is the devil's advice.

5. Ek bly hunker na jou. Sou jy ook nog bestaan? I am still yearning for you. Would you still have existed too?[34]

> *[Theory] is in my blood, my face my mother's voice it's in my voice my speech rhythms my dreams and memories it's the shape of my legs…it is my features — my eyes and face shape ... it must even be the way I sweat!* (Valerio, 1983:42)

The politics of Afrikaner-gasvryheid seem devoid of curious affective relation and the pleasure of engaging. Indeed, hospitality, as codified by Christian religious notions of 'Love thy neighbour as thyself,' is "shot through with anxiety, with the fear of becoming a 'police interrogation', and the *You* therefore cannot enter into a relation with the *Me*... [which] positions hospitality as something that only works through the repression of desire" (Deumert & Mabandla, 2017:415). The politics of hospitality, and more specifically Afrikaner-gasvryheid, are riddled with grammars of opposition, of self and other, emptying the so-called "other" of the agency and power to bring something to the table, and in so doing emptying the so-called "other" of selfhood and "into that crushing objecthood" (Fanon, 2008 [1952]:212). Surely, this is not all gasvryheid is or can be?

5.1. The politics of gasvryheid revisited.

Here I am inspired by the border-thinking of Ame Deumert and Nkululeko Mabandla (2017) in their *A luta continua – black queer visibilities and philosophies of hospitality in a South African rural town.* This is an ethnographic project conducted in Forestville, using "responses to diversity in non-metropolitan settings" in order to reconstruct "local philosophies of hospitality" (Deumert & Mabandla, 2017:397). The project looks at "affective-discursive practice" to argue that traces of Derrida's absolute hospitality can be found in Forestville. Thus, I turn my attention to thinking through and locating a radical queer politics of gasvryheid that embraces and moves with my own queerness (as a Queer womxn and an Afrikaner). I want to think through a gasvryheid that delights in the pleasure of curiosity, sharing and affective relation; the pleasure of meeting someone new and wanting to know each other, but also considers in this the vulnerability. (*It is an uneasy thought that, in these twilight days, pleasure should be called radical*). I want to speak to you about gasvryheid, and not only hospitality, for gasvryheid comes from my language and my language is (one of) my home(s). Thus to speak to you, on these pages which I have written, from my pages, and in my home language,

[34] This heading is a translated excerpt from *Soektog* in *Erfdeel,* 222.

is to speak to you from my home and invite you into my home (Derrida, 2000). And I say to you, (jy is) welkom in my huis.

I also wish to speak to you about gasvryheid, uncoupled from 'Afrikaner', because gasvryheid translated literally means the freedom of the guest, yet to categorise it as Afrikaner-gasvryheid is to limit and violate that freedom with the boundaries and borders of classification. The meaning of gasvryheid that says that all guests have freedom in(-between) each other's homes and are not bounded, boundaried, and bonded, (like 'Afrikaner' wishes to do in Afrikaner-gasvryheid*)* is the meaning I want to return to and explore for its productive possibilities for meaning making and navigating the everyday. I also use gasvryheid instead of hospitality because hospitality, "a word of Latin origin," is "of a troubled and troubling origin," and it is "a word which carries its own contradiction incorporated into it" (Derrida, 2000:3). Hospitality, like Afrikaner-gasvryheid, is a "word which allows itself to be parasitized by its opposite, 'hostility', the undesirable guest [*hôte*] which it harbors as the self-contradiction in its own body" (Derrida, 2000:3). Thus, in using gasvryheid, the possibility exists to move away from the contradictions that exist in hospitality, and refigure the old codes of hospitality.

But I also wish to speak to you not only in (and from) my home (language), for I am not (always) at home in my home. Often, I find myself un-homed from my home, haunted in my home, haunted by (the history) of my home, for I cannot (and do not always want to) discard 'Afrikaner' from myself, from my body. It is a contradiction I (must) carry in and on my body. Often, in my home (language), my tongue does not extend far enough and I find myself needing to speak to you in English, this language that is not (entirely) my own. This is the language that we both understand, and while it may or may not be your or my home (language), it is, for now, the pathway between my home (language) and you(rs)[*14]. Here, on this pathway, I wish to meet you, a fellow traveller[*15], beyond the grammars of

***14 This pathway between my home (language) and yours:**

Often, I speak only from this pathway, this language, for I am more at home on the pathway than in my (own) home. It is my home and it is not.

Sometimes, I wish to bring you something from my home (language) which this pathway, this language does not have and thus I translate it to you into this language that we both understand.

Always, I say to you, if you want, you can translate what I bring to you into your home language and welcome it into your home, make it at home in your home, make it part of your home.

Then, it will no longer be mine, or rather it will say that it never was (only) mine, and that it was here long before me, that it has left its traces on me, and I have left my traces on it.

Now, on this pathway, and/or in your home, you will leave your traces on it and it will leave its traces on you.

***15 A fellow traveller:**

I am a traveller in many ways. I travel from where I am, onto these pages, and to you. On these pages, I travel between languages that are my home and are not. In my body in the world, as a white, middle-class Afrikaner able-bodied (queer womxn) I have power (and I also do not). My body is a travelling body that exists in-between my identities.

opposition, on the threshold, with/in the (b)orderlands,[35] the third space. In *Elsewhere, Within Here*, Trinh T. Minh-ha (2011:28) writes of travellers saying that

> The travelling self is here both the self that moves physically from one place to another following "public routes and beaten tracks" within a mapped movement; *and*, the self that embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking between a here, a there, *and* an elsewhere.

The travelling self, the queer self, that stands at the threshold, op die stoep, is thus always in the in-between, in the third-space, always on the move. I am never entirely outside the De Wet's house, nor am I entirely inside. And while I stay in my sister's house, there too I am liminal. Like the traveller, I am constantly negotiating between here and there, on the stoep, even while our negotiations do not look the same and do not happen for the same reason, I am at the threshold with the traveller, on the border between this and that, in the in-between space. This in-between, these (b)orderlands, as Anzaldua (1987:95) writes, are "always a path/state to something else" and as such this is a space that is fertile with potential for things both old and new, for to be on "path/state to something else" is not only to move to something but also to acknowledge and cherish that I am moving *from somewhere*. That, in my open hand, and closed fist, the tensing of shoulders, I am my father, mother, sister, and

> Every gesture, every word involves our past, present, and future. The body never stops accumulating, and years and years have gone by mine without my being able to stop them, stop it. My sympathies and grudges appear at the same time familiar and unfamiliar to me; I dwell in them, they dwell in me, and we dwell in each other, more as guest than as owner. My story, no doubt, is me, but it is also, no doubt, older than me (Minh-ha, 1989:123).

[35] The writing of (b)orderlands with the parentheses placed around the 'b' was first done by Adela C. Licona (2005:105) which she explains in her *(B)orderlands' Rhetorics and Representations: The Transformative Potential of Feminist Third-Space Scholarship and Zines* as follows:

> To represent third-space complexities inherent in (b)orderlands' rhetorics, I place parentheses around the b of (b)orderlands both to materialize a discursive border and to visibly underscore the myriad ways borders (much like dichotomies) have historically operated to artificially divide, order, and subordinate. However, the parentheses also work to interrupt any fixed reading of the notion of (b)orderlands. This neologic representation allows me to re-imagine and re-claim the generative potential of (b)orderlands' rhetorics that resist the delimitations of imposed (discursive) borders and acknowledge the inherent and generative relationships between ambiguous, oppositional, and even contradictory parts. (B)orderlands, then, imply both the structured and structuring places and practices that (b)order (order, outline, de*ne, delimit, and discipline) our understandings of, and relationships to, one another. Writing (b)orderlands with the visible interruption of the parentheses is a way of representing a conscious transcendence to a generative third space of movement and messiness.

At your door, on your stoep, do not ask me to take my boots off yet; lend me a jar that can hold the sand and soil and dust I brush from my boots. I will make holes in the lid, for breathing, because if there is 'dirt' I want to keep close, this is different from saving it, airlessly enclosed. The travelling self, the queer body "has a plural personality," that "operates in a pluralistic mode - nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (Anzaldua, 1987:101). On the move, in flux, at once past, present and future, we not only "sustain contradictions," but we turn "the ambivalence into something else" (Anzaldua, 1987:101). Here, even Afrikaners can sustain the ambivalence of our history and see it for its productivity, instead of casting it in its Afrikaner nationalist vocabularies of 'impurity'; since "third-space lived experiences of both/and dilute notions of purity and authenticity so that neither are meaningful signifiers in third-space (con)texts" (Licona, 2005:106). In this kaleidoscope, where light not only refracts but diffracts, queer bodies (bodies that are in-between and deviate from the norm) meet and brush up against one another as they move from and toward different spaces, doorsteps, homes and abroads, and from this meeting place of difference, meaning is made. Such queer bodies are what Minh-ha terms the inappropriate/d others, we who are inappropriate and who cannot be appropriated, "not quite other, not quite same" (Minh-ha interview: 1998). Haraway (1992:299) writes that to be the inappropriate/d other "is not to fit in the taxon, to be dislocated from the available maps specifying kinds of actors and kinds of narratives, not to be originally fixed by difference". She further describes us as being "in critical, deconstructive relationality, in a diffracting rather than reflecting (ratio)nality - as the means of making potent connection that exceeds domination" (Haraway, 1992:299).

Here, in the (b)orderlands, a radical queer politics of affective hospitality, indeed, gasvryheid becomes possible wherein the act of gasvryheid is no longer figured in contractual vocabularies as an opportunity for the "guest" to take from the "host", as Afrikaners' forebears did when they arrived in South Africa. Nor is this an opportunity for the "hosts" to be hostile to their "guests" and show them away. Instead, in the first encounter, bodies are not opposed to each other operating from distrust and defence. Thus, bodies also do not seek to classify, boundary, and other one another based on the differences that exist between them. Instead, gasvryheid in and from the (b)orderlands can be read as an opportunity to share our spaces, share our stories with each other and enjoy the affective, the pleasure of engaging and sharing with and alongside (b)orderlands' bodies, bodies previously figured as 'other'. "Affect", writes Cifor (2016:8), "is a force that creates a relation between a body and the world. It is at the core of how we form,

sustain and break social relations, differences and individual and collective identities". This sharing, this relation, this sharing in relation, is characterised by a curiosity to listen to each other's stories, not to fetishize, essentialise or exoticise each other's difference and alterity for "to essentialize… alterity as unfathomable is ultimately a form of silencing: it takes away voice and face, creating a fully anonymous other, an oriental fantasy" (Deumert & Mabandla, 2017:405). Instead, it is a curious sharing towards mutual meaning making and knowledge production. This curiosity does not ask "where you are from" and "what is your name" so that I can form a judgment of you, and categorise you but to know and share in your story, and for you to know me and share in my story. I would like to note that here I am focusing specifically on sharing our stories in a gasvryheid relationality within, on and through the space of the arts. Further questions can and should be raised with regards to the applicability of this relationality in other contexts. However, for the purposes and scope of this study, I am going to limit my discussion to the sharing of stories within, on and through the space of the arts.

When we share our stories from, through, and in a gasvryheid relationality (that says I am free (to move and be) in your home(s), you are free (to move and be) in mine and we are free (to move and be) in-between), a connection can form between in-between bodies. Through this connection between queer(ed) in-between bodies, we can attempt not to represent, nor to speak for one another, but rather to speak with and alongside one another. For to be represented, to be spoken for, is to be "permanently speechless, forever requiring the services of a ventriloquist, never forcing a recall vote" and "the represented is reduced to the permanent status of the recipient of action, never to be a co-actor in an articulated practice among unlike, but joined, social partners" (Haraway, 1992:311-312). Instead, in the sharing that is made possible through a gasvryheid relationality in the (b)orderlands, in speaking with and alongside one another, "(dis)(re)articulation as a tool for community building" (Licona, 2005a:107) becomes possible. Away from the strictures of old social codes (like Afrikaner Nationalism) that wish to boundary and restrict in-between bodies, in-between bodies can share stories that rupture "traditional reading, writing, and representational structures and practices…" (Licona 2005b:107). Through a gasvryheid relationality, "subversive, third-space tactics that can prove discursively disobedient to the confines of phallogocentrism and its colonizing effects over time and place" (Licona, 2005b:107) can begin to emerge through the act of sharing and listening. This means that the disarticulation[*16] of old constraining social codes (of writing, thinking, acting, being) can take place and then that the (re)articulation of *embodied* ways of

being and knowing in the world becomes possible. The (dis)(re)articulation of old social codes acknowledges and takes into account the history of these codes and that they are still intertwined in the everyday. And (dis)(re)articulation works towards dismantling these social codes by disrupting and refiguring their logic (through embodied writing, being, acting). Thus, the productive possibilities of a gasvryheid relationality are not romantic utopian notions for they will challenge our position in the social order. Here, as we sit side by side and I tell you the story of the traveller, something is stirring in the leaves growing from our skin folding into the dust. In this encounter with the queer, with the traveller, with the story and the subsequent curse, on this (b)orderland of the page and in our bodies, the listener, Pieter, the Afrikaner, you and I... we are "startled, surprised, by what [we] do not expect to find [in]… a moment of irrevocable discomfort and disorientation" (Melville, 2003:16). Standing (t)here, unsettled on the threshold of his home, at the threshold of the self, we see our "own internal differences in the foreign face of another," and thus "drawn temporarily out of of [ourselves] and [our] home) so that [we] question [our] place in a future [we] can no longer foresee" (Melville, 2003:16).

***16 Disarticulate:**

1. Separate (bones) at the joints.
   A limb of the body of my work has disarticulated.
2. Disrupt the logic of (an argument or opinion)
   Third-space bodies disarticulate conventional theories.

This will inevitably be coupled with emotions of shame since shame, Van der Westhuizen (2017:206) writes quoting Melvin R. Lansky, "is a 'disturbance to the status of the self within the social order', pertaining to one's standing in the social order and how one is seen before 'the eye of the other'". If this shame goes unacknowledged, Van der Westhuizen (2017:206) notes, it "activates a repetitive loop of feelings, including socially destructive anger, which can in turn retrigger shame". However, Van der Westhuizen (2017:206) argues that acknowledged shame can be transformative since it "averts anger and even allows the mending of the social bond" and therefore "it makes available disruptive moments in processes of identity formation". Thus, while a gasvryheid relationality in the (b)orderlands is coupled with shame, a difficult and uncomfortable emotion to experience, this is not necessarily negative or without joy, for it precisely opens the possibility for the disarticulation of old social codes that are embedded in those with power. And the act of meeting in the (b)orderlands and sharing in a gasvryheid relationality is a "mutual humanisation through a consciously driven politics of recognition" (Van der Westhuizen, 2017:211). Through this, it becomes possible for in-between bodies to

(re)articulate theory that stems from our lived experience and "uncover Other ways of being, and of knowing, in order to make meaning of the everyday" (Licona, 2005b:106).

The loci of these (dis)(re)articulations are at once the (b)orderlands and the (queer) body (of writing). Indeed, the body (of writing) can be read as the (b)orderlands since it is through, in and on the (queer) body (of writing) that the contradictions of being an inappropriate/d other are and can be discursively mediated and enunciated. In (and on) the body (of writing), we meet and (can) share stories, navigate our shame and figure our existences in the in-between. "We must blur the boundaries between the interior and the exterior, and the psychic and the social. The reciprocal space revealed is the space of the interstitial, the liminal—a fertile, new, third space" (Licona, 2005a:86). As such, our (queer) bodies (of writing) both move in and *are* the (b)orderlands, the third space and here we "put language into play by using disruptive discursive strategies that reflect our lived experiences as fragmented, partial, real, and imagined, and always in the process of becoming" (Licona, 2005b:107). The (queer, third-space, (b)orderland(`)s) body is thus central to the possibilities for knowledge production and meaning making. "Only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed" writes Anzaldua (1987:97), "and for images, words, stories to have this transformative power, they must arise from the human body—flesh and bone—and from the Earth's body—stone, sky, liquid, soil".

Central to these poetics of affective hospitality is a queer ballad of bodies that are 'not supposed to' love one another, of 'illegitimate' pleasure and enjoyment, of non-(re)productive love that refuses to (re)produce norms that codify difference and sameness as mutually exclusive, and revels in the pleasure of sharing and enjoying another for their company. Practising such a politics of gasvryheid is dissident to old Kantian codes of hospitality that seek only to tolerate the other. Yet it is also dissident to Derridian codes of hospitality that wish to avoid pressing 'the other' into sameness by not asking 'the other' to define the contours of their difference since "asking is risky as our questions can serve to position the other in ways that violate their uniqueness; yet not asking limits the potential for engagement and creates fantasies of total difference" (Deurmert & Mabandla 2017: 405). Instead, this politics wishes to dance in the (b)orderlands, on the threshold, alongside and in the midst of a toutrek, to embrace the contradictions of recognizing fundamental sameness and irreducible difference. In this embrace of contradiction, the boundaries between host and guest begin to blur. In recognising

the entanglement of the inside with the outside, who is figured as guest and who is figured as host becomes vague and indistinguishable.

It is through such a (queer) affective gasvryheid that we can theorize in the flesh and travellers can meet each other in the (b)orderlands, on the (queer) body (of writing) to share our stories. In sharing our stories from/in/on the (b)orderlands, we "move in many directions and knowingly 'occupy' an interstitial space where we practice third-space feminism" (Perez, 1999:20). The power of the curse, the story, the rumour of the De Wets milling around our tongues and creeping through our ears, does not lie in the curse alone, but also in the silence(s) that the curse unearths and in the retelling of the story. Its power is engendered by sprouting roots in-between the cracks and contradictions inherent not only in heteronormativity, but also inherent in the conditionality that is placed on gasvryheid when it is named Afrikaner-gasvryheid. The story and curse "animates, sets into motion, and rouses the forces that lie dormant in things, in beings" (Minh-ha, 1989:129). Thus, that which is queer about the story reveals itself through traces, gestures, whispers; (the queerness of) the story is also promulgated through rumours, and speculations. Indeed, queer(ed) humxns' stories, such as the Boontjieskraal example, often only linger on in the traces left behind, like the (queered) traveller continues to live on in die volksmond, in oral (re)tellings of the story, queerly "embodying [social] order's traumatic encounter with its own inescapable failure" (Edelman, 2004:26). José Esteban Muñoz (2009:72) reminds me that "queer energies and lives" are often "laid bare" in "small gestures, particular intonations": in the curl of my fringe, in the way my mouth moves when I speak, in the raising of my hair when she touches me. Following Muñoz' (2009:65) lead, I listen quietly for his advice: "the key to queering evidence... (is) suturing it to the concept of ephemera. Think of ephemera as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor [sic]".

In mourning the theft of my archive – all that work gone, lost, needing to be done again and never, however, able to be exactly re-called - I wish to have the experience lean into the failure of the archive. Instead of trying to archive the lives of queer people, an act which has shown itself as impossible, I wish to engage with what lies between presence and absence, fragment and whole. These are the (b)orderlands where I stand in a gasvryheid relationality to you and queerly read and tell the everyday, folkloric stories of my people, foregrounding and embracing what is queer, uncanny and uncouth in these stories. Like the curse, I wish to unearth the queer silences in the everyday, and disrupt the lineage of "evidentiary paradigms founded on record

"families," wholeness, and presence" and in so doing disrupt "the compulsory heterosexuality of this archival thinking" that "pervade[s] discourses of the document itself" (Hernandez, 2015:74). By foregrounding the queer in the quotidian, by embracing the queerness that is so central to the stories of in-between people, I create theory that arises from my flesh, from our flesh, and that helps us navigate the everyday through new ways of being. (Turn to **Met die Helm Gebore** for an exploration of how a different way of seeing and listening to these stories might be possible and enabling in moving toward facing my ghosts. Here, too, you might find why telling these stories is important.) (Turn to **The Humming Soil of Boontjieskraal** and **The Heaped Bones of August** for my telling of some of these stories. Here you might also find my exploration of finding a (queer) language and/of storytelling that guides me in telling my stories.)

C.

The Humming Soil of Boontjieskraal

With hands stretched to the corners of our berry stained fingertips, breathing a tune we all knew from the days before the naked jackals ran in the fields, we balanced one foot in front of the other on the white walls that towered around the old house. The hollow willow trees branched low over the wall. Their leaves tickled the hairs on our arms. This way we circled the house for hours until the pink horizon rose in a hazy dome over the house and the clouds gathered, blanketing the sky to shield us. Then, we jumped off into the tall grass burnt yellow by the sun. We curled inwards, hands pressed into fists on the ground as we lowered our bodies deep into our hips, knees tucked into our chests, our figures completely hidden.

This way we crawled under the washing line, past the rusting wheel barrow and the anthill, between the pink krismis roses, all the way to the edge of the house just below the window. Where we leaned our backs against the white chalked walls and sank into them until we disappeared. First it became dark, a swollen darkness that felt never ending and swallowed our skins. Then brown and creaking the wooden floors of the narrow dark room appeared below our stained feet, eaten by termites, and with the lace curtains around our shoulders, careful of the green windowsill above our heads, we curled our shoulders into ourselves.

In the corner of the narrow dark room, a small girl is coiled, head buried in her arms. The last colour is draining from her skin into her shoes, dripping down between her legs, turning her white socks yellow then brown. She plaits her black hair. Brushes the creases from her round-collared black dress. With every brush her skin peels back in wisps of dust and her bones threaten to push through and pierce the thinned skin but she does not bleed. It seems her body has dried up. Her veins and glands and pores have been emptied into the steel bucket hitched to the inner crook of her elbow. Cobwebs grow from the holes in the palms of her hands twisting around her arms flanking her sides with a white veil and creeping across the floor and up the wall and around the crocheted lampshade and into our ears that ring, with the strange familiar song.

We try not to look at her. We have other things to think about. We are sure that she is a figment of our imaginations. But she won't leave. At the tilt of every hour, she lifts her head to look at us from underneath her folded eyelids. And then, she speaks:

"For seven years, I have lived in a stone tower that grows between the chafing bark of the raw-boned yellow forest. I eke out my days on the morsels of warmth leaking through the leaves that rest on the sound of the river eating the pebbles till they are round. My bed is made of green moss and in the evenings I receive empty letters on a string from the sky. From my window, I can see the yellow trees. Their hollows are the homes of the naked jackals and their pups suckling at their breasts. When the fever of the sun rises over the horizon, the milk turns pink with blood but the greedy mouths do not stop. Four jackals have died this way. Left their carcasses to dry on the red rocks. Strung their teeth together for pearls around my neck. And now my hair turns auburn when I brush it and tie it with a vine.

"In the forest, a man walks, leaning against the wind, hands in the pockets of his grey coat. His eyes comb the roots under his feet for a strand of his daughter's hair. His heavy boots leave no prints in the soil. He always turns to look at me, a whisper on his lips, but then his face falls away as if he has been caught stealing. I reach out to draw his warmth to my fingertips but he disappears and becomes a curtain shadow in the window.

"I cannot remember when I got here, I do not remember when I was born. The people who live here cannot tell me either. They say only that they have lived here for many years. Empty words rest in empty songs on the strings of their kitaars. Along the edge of the forest there is an old gravel road, stretched out by the feet of the first people of this land. The road is a path I remember. I remember travelling on that road with the family I once had, but that memory seems far away. There was rain dripping on my cheek seeping through the canvas cover of our wagon. A small boy with black curls who shivered beside me, our cold-skinned bodies pressed together, bones rattling with the large wooden wheels as they jutted over stones in the road. My mother also sits beside me, hands folded together in her lap. She looks tired. Her eyes are heavy under the weight of the long day. We have been travelling for hours and our stomachs groan. From deep within her belly, sounds echo. I can hear the earth summoning something. Water, she says. The sound of the Swartrivier. She says we will soon have to cross. A sturdy man cracks his whip in the air, the horses' hooves straining against the skin of the wind. Foam froths white and thick at their necks, their coats unravelling the sky. And in the east, the quilted mountains are growing. The road is flanked by old yellowwood trees whose shadows move their long fingers over the humming soil. An owl, perched on a branch, twists its head to follow us with her eyes. As we draw near to the river, the horses lift and heave against the air and halt. The man – my father, I think – cracks his whip again, but they dig their hooves deeper into the mud. They will not move. Their bodies understand the thrumming that hums from the earth. The usually shallow crossing has been flooded by the water spirits; the

river sweeps away anything in its path. Fording the river is impossible. My father turns the horses away from the torrent, towards safety.

The first farm gate we find is marked with a carved wooden sign: 'Boontjieskraal'. We halt in front of a house with a straw roof, white chalked walls and green shutters. The shutters are rattling in the wind. The windowsills are blotched with blackened moss and on the porch a rocking horse bobs her head in time with the restless branches of a hollow willow tree.

Quietly we sit and wait. Father knocks on the farmhouse door. The wind pushes against the window frames, and the green shutters threaten to unhinge themselves and walk away. The walls seem to breathe quietly against the backdrop of midnight's feverish rage, slowly releasing the day's heat. In the window, the last embers in the fireplace glow through the layers of dust. Someone has left a red book upturned on the kitchen table, and in the corner of the front room a white dog sleeps. Bristly fur gently rises, and falls.

Father has told us about the De Wets, the family that lives here. Some believe they are relatives of Generaal Christiaan de Wet, the famous Boer general and leader of the rebellion against the English.

Father used to work for another man who owns a farm. The man was stern. But he had his followers. A Jack Russell always trotted stiff-legged behind him. Every morning his children went to the school in the town and in the afternoons they shot stones at rusted tin cans with their ketties.

I did not go to go to school. My mother taught me the letters of the alphabet while we washed clothes at the big house. I remember how our hands worked together against the wash board, fingertips shrivelled by the soapy water. My tongue felt the roof of my mouth and the back of my teeth, learning the sounds. And she told me the stories of our people. Father never told me why we had to leave.

The De Wet couple sat alone in the kitchen, before we came. Nothing on the table but their folded hands and tea cups, and the sound of the teaspoon set down on the saucer and the green shutters swinging back and forth on their hinges. (I have watched them from the cracks in these walls for many years since then, this family; they often sit this way, growing old. Their skins stretch, waiting for the day to seep away so that he can read and she can fold the linen and draw the curtains.) Their children are asleep in their rooms, night braiding around their foreheads. The woman is looking down at her dress and the stained apron that covers her waist. She strokes her thighs as if to press out the creases. She is still young but her mouth is pinched, her hair covered with a bonnet. She wears boots, like his.

Under their boots, termites are eating the house from the ground up, mandibles sharpened by years of hard earth, the stony sins of the De Wet fathers. Moths flicker, gathering to watch the shadow lanterns playing warm across the white walls.

He does not tell her but he notices some flour on her cheekbone just below her eye. She must have been baking, he thinks, although there is no smell of dough clinging to the air. Rather, the room smells of rooibos tea and air trapped in a musty cupboard. It has been too long.

She thinks that even now their son Henry looks just like him when she first fell in love with him. Back then, when his parents owned the apple farm and when he called to her, and they would run in between the rows of trees, slipping on the rotten fruit littering their path. How they used to hide when they were young children, and kiss when they got older. She remembers how much he used to laugh, untouched by the bitterness that has turned his beard grey. She always thought that the years he spent toiling in the sun sucked him dry of the moisture of intimacy and turned his bones to chalk. Now there is no more tenderness that softens his eyes, he only grumbles, drinks the moer coffee she makes and stuffs his pipe. He rises early in the morning, earlier than the coming heat requires. He leaves her untouched, braced by the cold turn of his back. When he leaves he thinks she is still sleeping.

But she is awake, lying still; feeling his heavy body lift off the mattress. She is turned towards him and wants to reach out to him to stroke his hairy hands or the bristly hair on his cheek but she keeps her hands folded together underneath her pillow. Soon after he leaves the house, she will rise to make breakfast for the children.

Every morning is the same. And every night. Waking and sleeping.

> “Noumaartoe, laat ek gaan slaap voor dit te laat raak. Môre is ’n nuwe dag” he says taking the last sip of his tea.
> “Nag, ek kom amper bed toe”

He leaves crumbs on the table and a ring where his cup was. She knows he will read first and she will sit alone thickening the curdled night around Boontjieskraal. Through the rain, she hears every sound. His breathing in the next room. Tree branches scraping against the roof above her. She doesn’t know if it is her imagination, but in the distance, she hears hooves plowing through the wet mud. The rain falls harder, pelting against the window, and she tries to follow the path of a single drop moving down on the glass to the windowsill, and away.

Lightning splits the darkness and she catches glimpses of a wet black birds. One of the lonely creatures of the night world.

She sees the shape of our wagon coming toward their gate, hears us halt outside the house. Then, heavy footsteps and an urgent knock on the door. She sits without breathing, hands white knuckled and clutching the table. Another urgent knock, louder this time. Pieter comes out of the bedroom pulling his trousers over his stained long johns. He grabs the lantern off the table. Opens the door. His frame fills the doorway as he lifts his lantern to my father's face.

My father takes off his brown leather cap and reaches out with an open palm to greet Mr De Wet. His hand is left to linger untouched and dripping with water. I see how he lets his hand fall to his side. I peer hard into the shadows on Mr De Wet's eyebrows, his cheekbones. His lips move but I cannot make out what he saying. He and my father are talking but the sounds of their exchange are drowned out by the windswept rain that beats down on the roof.

Mr De Wet gestures with a pointed finger to the farm gate and slams the door in my father's face. Standing on the porch, trousers clinging to his legs, my father straightens his broad shoulders to fill the corners of his grey coat and returns to the wagon. I remember that the air in the wagon was heavier then and the weight pressed down on our shoulders and chests. My mother looked at my brother looking at me looking at my boots that were full of water squelching between my toes. And I remember my father sitting a while with the reins of the horses clutched in his hands, hands resting on his knees. Then he cracked the whip and urged the horses on, away from the farmhouse and its door and its people. He knew we could not turn back, knew the cold was too sharp and the rain too heavy to wait for morning's light. The distance we'd come already was too far. So we would have to cross the Swartrivier at the ford. We would have to pray to the old water spirits to carry us across."

When the girl is finished speaking, she places her hands, one above the other, on the doorframe following it with her palms as if to measure the silence until she can reach no higher. A single ray of sunlight ambers the middle of room, across the brown and cold and dark. The ceiling is pressing down lower and lower and the black and white family photos hanging on sanguine rusting nails are tilting further and further away from the walls, their strings tightening and threatening to snap.

Crouched in the doorway, sitting low into his hips, there is a man in a grey coat and brown leather cap. We don't know how long he has been listening, or when he appeared but he is looking at the girl, waiting for her, leaning towards her as if called by her. He looks down,

searching the paths eaten in the wooden floors by the termites. Then, at the tilt of the hour he speaks.

"We had to cross the ford. We had no other road to follow. I remember the children's flailing arms among the rushing water and branches sticking out like old fingers grasping for light. The leaves clinging to their faces and washing away again and the gurgling sound of their voices and breaths fighting to stay above the water. Their hands reaching for some hold on the river bank. But there was only slime and soil. Her bonnet pulling at her neck and untying itself whisked away by the spirits of the water. And I am reaching for them and I find no hold, only the fast fingers of water. We had to cross the ford; we had no other road.

I want to make my arms longer, stretch the muscles and bones and skin like my body could when I was still young but I am old and my beard is speckled with grey years and old worries, worries I inherited from my father and lines around my eyes given to me by my mother. I curse my arms that are too short to reach them, my hands that are too small and too weak to hold them and the roots of their hair that do not grow deep enough in their scalp to hold my grip. We had to cross the ford, we had no other road to follow.

I remember seeing her rushing downstream, soon a figure in the distance. Then her foot was caught on a gnarled root that jutted into the river, and the water pulled her underneath. Held her fast on the floor of the river. The current could no longer drag her away but kept her under, water rushing in her face unable to reach for the air.

And one by one they stop writhing under the thumb of the night and the rushing water and the leaves and branches and roots and slime and soil...they all slip away becoming the darkness. Their hearts stop beating in their chests and start beating in mine. Hammering. Three hearts shattering my chest.

They never leave me. My mind is held in their cupped hands, wrapped in strands of their hair. I am here, but I am always writhing. Always clawing at the air for a morsel of life so that I do not have to continue the journey alone. I am always searching for their nails, their teeth, their eyelashes in the soil of Boontjieskraal. We had to cross the ford, we had no other road to follow and now I cannot live where I am. Everyone here remembers them, my small children, my wife. But only I remember the smell in the napes of their necks.

When Mr De Wet took my flesh and threw us out into the cold night, my lungs strangled the air, wringing it of life and from my throat I bellowed a curse upon their bloodline, binding them to death as he has bound mine.

Each De Wet generation would birth only one son and he would die a death as violent as the death of my children and wife. The curse grew wings and made a nest in every branch it could find, carving its name into the bark of every yellowwood tree. The curse grew legs and walked to every creased corner of the farm. It sank its teeth into the roads and its spit became the gravel that covered them. After that night, I could never leave. I live here, among my dead, in the caves of the mountains, painting the pictures of my story in smoke on the walls. I sing dirges with the crows to pass the time. Until my eyes are dull with dust and soot and my boots are worn threadbare. I live in the shadowlands on the horizon where the sun does not reach. My ears are hollow and the water sloshes around in them. Now, I cannot hear the night time hour's stories. I can hear only the water whisper with the voices of my children asking me to hold their hands and stroke their hair, their faces shining up at me as they lie in my lap under the moonlight."

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After that day, the people say, Pieter de Wet was stuck with a seed in his left shoe. In the evenings he would peel off his tired boots and shake them, hoping the seed would fall out. But every morning, before the heat of the day arrived, he would feel the seed pressing into his heel again. In his sweaty boots, the seed started growing vines that snaked up his leg and around his thigh and every day the vine grew stronger and tighter. Pieter could feel the vine growing, and he cut into his flesh to tear it from his legs, but he could see nothing.

Now, Pieter de Wet was a stern man. He once shot a rooster between the eyes for messing on his Model T Ford. The same car that he polished for church on Sundays, the car that had been imported from America, the only car in the Caledon district. He also owned an expensive bull that once made the mistake of chasing him. Pieter shot the bull right between the eyes and said "Jong, daar is net een baas van dié plaas". He was less certain though, when the invisible vine grew tighter and tighter, strangling his body in its grip. One Sunday, when he was on his way to church in his Model T, the vine grew so tight that the blood in his veins could no longer reach his legs and as his calves felt heavier and more weighted, a strange numbness spread from his toes, up, up in grainy speckled tingles to his thighs, and his legs started turning blue. His foot sank onto the accelerator and the car picked up speed. Unable to move his legs, he lost control of his car and drove off a low bridge. They say he was the first victim of the traveller's curse.

Pieter fathered many daughters but only one son, Hendrik Christoffel de Wet. This Henry was a respected man among the town's people, revered even. He served on several public boards and agricultural associations, being Chairman of the Caledon Divisional Council,

Vice-Chairman of the Caledon Farmers' Co-operative Association, and Director of the Caledon Chamber of Executors. From 1933 till his death, he served as the Member of Parliament for the Caledon constituency in the United Party of General Smuts. And thanks to various labours in the service of his notability, never was a single crease to be found in his shirts.

While working in the field with his only son (named Pieter, after his grandfather), Henry noticed something wrong with the feed of the machine they used to separate the grain from the stalks. Somehow a branch had gotten caught in the workings. He threw the machine into gear to dislodge the branch, causing the mass of grain that he was standing on to move toward the cylinder. The grain started swallowing him. The grain was ingesting him, twisting around his feet, his ankles, his legs; his hands, his wrists, his arms. No matter how he twisted and turned, he could not pull himself out. Along with the grain, he was pulled foot first into the cylinder. Unable to stop the machine, the blades in the drum started slicing and eating his ankle, shredding the skin and splintering the bone. Pieter saw his father writhing in the grain and ran to help him. He managed to stop the machine but Henry's leg was already mangled, his blood seeping into the grain.

That afternoon, a storm swept over the farm, flooding the roads. The town doctor only arrived at the farm five hours after the accident. Henry's mauled leg had to be amputated just above the knee.

For hours, young Pieter sat by his father's bedside feeding him water and stroking his hair but that night, caught in the throes of a fevered dream, lying in the arms of his only son, Henry died of shock to his system. His eyes were wide open.

The people say that this young Pieter, like his father, eventually also died alongside his son, also named Hendrik Christoffel (Henry) De Wet. One morning, this Pieter and this Henry were travelling in his left-hand drive Packard when a thick, yellow-winged fog settled on the road. The fog crept in through the open windows of the car, into Pieter's ears, spreading up inside his skull and taking root behind his eyes. Small lacerations formed in the corneas and one by one the veins in his eyeballs burst until he was blinded, and could only see the yellow marrow of the fog in his mind. He crashed into the back of a truck and was immediately deceased. Young Henry was found in the wreckage with a broken shoulder and a crushed leg.

The fog never left young Henry, even as he grew. It crept into his mind and braided itself around his broken bones and into the scars that formed on his skin. Henry often asked the people of the area for the name of the traveller who had knocked on his great grandfather's door that night so many years ago, but no one could tell him.

And the accident with his father was only young Henry's first. He got into three other accidents. In the first accident, he broke his arm and in the second he drove off a bridge and lay waiting for help until the next day. The third accident left Henry alone spread out on the concrete. Henry had determined never to drive, intending cleverly to escape the fate of his father and his grandfather. So he had hired someone to drive him around. This worked well, as far as it worked well, but a young man's urges can be urgent, and so it was that Henry, unable to resist the urge to drive, on 24 June 1972, stepped into his white BMW 02 Series and sped away from the farm, hoping that the wind in his hair and the space of the open road would clear the fog in his mind. That day, at the age of 27, on the same road where his father and his grandfather died, Henry drove into an oncoming car. And so died the last male heir in the blood line of Pieter Daniel de Wet. Only one De Wet was left to inherit the farm Boontjieskraal: Doreza, Henry's eldest sister.

D.

Met die helm gebore: toward a local methodology of seeing

When I am born into the world, the first thing I am is my mother's child. Strangers tear my shivering, bloodied body away from the only home I have ever known, away from mother's warmth, mother's scent, mother's rhythmic heartbeat, mother's water-womb. I protest red-faced, inflamed cheeks bloodied with mucous. This is how my m/other tells it. Or as I remember. My little lungs wail with the only sound I know how to voice. I am marked only as the child of my mother. In that moment, all I am is my mother's child. It is the first identity with which I am sewn together and that I will carry in the seams of my skin until I pass on to my next life. Even before the name of a father around my wrist, this mother's child is the link I bear, the claim that sets me apart from all the other babies. Rows and rows of babies. Joined in the forlorn struggle against the shudders of the new world we have been obliged to meet. Each baby in a crib; cribs in rows; rows of weeping bundles that seem so quickly to fill up the empty spaces of the production line. The reproduction of new life. Babies lying in beds not made by us, but that we must lie in. Where they have lain us, and would have us lie down

My mother's eyes shone only with hope. She hoped that the life carried in her body would live free from the restraints that had formed bruised welts on her body. My mother cloaked my small frame in skins woven with could-bes and yet-to-comes. Her most perfect deed. If she could have carried me forever, shielding me from the world outside, perhaps she would have. But in being born, from that world there was no escaping, and even in gestation the waters of her womb could not suspend what she had already inherited and internalised: the inequities of her mother and father, and their mothers and fathers before that, the inequities of my father and his mother and father, and theirs before that.

So too, I inherit the inequities of my father and mother and their mothers and fathers and their mothers and fathers before that (turn to **Jou diepste verste spore loop ook dood. Your deepest furthest footprints are also fading** where you will find me searching for and trying to understand the story of those who came before me). In these I have grown, and have come to be born. Now, I must reckon with them and with what they have produced. They are my ghosts, the hauntings that I must follow, even summoning them to me, the ghosts with whom I must come face to face. "What does the ghost say as it speaks, barely, in the interstices of the visible and the invisible? … [W]e are part of the story, for better or worse: the ghost must speak *to me* in some way sometimes similar to, sometimes distinct from how it may be speaking to the others" (Gordon, 2008:24), but I struggle to see them, to hear them, to speak to them. My eyes are trained to focus on "bloodless categories, narrow notions of the visible and

the empirical" and I am to abide by "professional standards of indifference, institutional rules of distance and control" produced by all the "barely speakable fears of losing the footing that enables us to speak authoritatively and with greater value than anyone else who might" (Gordon 2008:21). (Turn to **Introduction**) *But to my ghosts I must speak.* I am searching, wanting to cup my hands against their windows to look in; cup my hands against my windows and look out. But the windows are dusty and their lives are "bloot 'n skadu teen die muur" [mere shadows on the wall] (Du Plessis, 2004:219, my translation). Like Avery Gordon (2008:57) I seek the "willingness to follow ghosts, neither to memorialize nor to slay, but to follow where they lead, in the present, head turned backwards and forwards at the same time. To be haunted in the name of a will to heal is to help you imagine what was lost that never existed, really"[*1] but how do I crane my neck to turn my head backwards and forwards at the same time? Or do I grow eyes at the back of my head? Or will I find them there already if I lift up my hair? What is this orientation? How can I follow ghosts I have been trained not to see, indeed to rationalise away from reality and lay to rest? My ghosts demand a "different kind of knowledge, a different kind of acknowledgment" (2008:57) than the Enlightenment, Cartesian systems I have been trained in. To meet my ghosts, to speak to them, I must "consider a different way of seeing, one that is less mechanical, more willing to be surprised, to link imagination and critique, one that is more attuned to the task of 'conjur[ing] up the appearances of something that [is] absent'" (Berger, 1972:10 quoted in Gordon, 2008:24). While the organised and systemic violence that is committed against individuals and/or groups of people often repress them until they are refigured into pasts, "the past is alive enough in the present, in the now" for them to remain alive "and accessible to encounter" (Gordon, 2008:65-66) even in their present absence and absent presences.

***1 Healing**

To heal is to make whole again, sew together what has been ruptured, fragmented, to bring together that which has been separated by a gap. Healing cannot and does not attempt to erase the wound or the violence that inflicted it. Instead, the gap is filled with new cells formed from those the body already carries. In this way, the flesh remembers the rupture under the skin, in the skin and/or on it.

Gordon (2008:66) also notes that "it takes some effort to recognize the ghost and to reconstruct the world it conjures up". To fight for these ghosts' pasts, so to speak, she suggests Walter Benjamin's notion of blasting; "a method of dialectics that reconstructs a lifework by following the scrambled trail the ghost leaves" (Gordon, 2008:66). She observes that this depends on "animation, on being able to demonstrate to others the moment in which an open door comes alive and stops us in our tracks, provoking a different kind of encounter and recognition. And for that, the quickening experience of haunting is essential" (Gordon, 2008:67). But I am still

left unsatisfied. Because while Gordon (2008:65) suggests that "the very way in which we discover things or learn about others or grapple with history is intimately tied to the very things themselves, to their variable modes of operation, and thus to how we can change them", I still do not know *how* to discover these things. I still do not know how to retrain my eyes and ears to seek the quickening experience of haunting because "what finds its way out from the underground and the out there is spoken in rhythms and tones, in a language that solicits a different hearing" (Minh-ha, 2016:3). I still do not know exactly how to see and listen in-between the visible and invisible, the audible and inaudible, with the interstitial liminality of presence and absence. "[W]ith what ear does one receive the other side of speech?"(Minh-ha, 2016:3) What would this method of seeing and listening look like for a Queer Afrikaner womxn? I must return to where I came from, from my mother(‘s) tongue, and hers and hers to find a way to see and hear differently.

1. To be born with die helm.

> *Ta Vuurmaak was ’n baie ou man. Hoe oud, het niemand geweet nie. Sy ouderdom kon net geskat word aan die stories oor sy kinderdae… Die kinders het Ta Vuurmaak se geselskap baie geniet…En, het hy… gesê: Laat enige kind na die cabin toe kom, nie net die wat onse mense lyk nie.*
> *[M]y kinders, het Ta Vuurmaak gesê, [p]arty mense kan ’n gees sien, gewoonlik dié wat met die helm gebore is.*
> *Wat is die helm, Ta? het een gevra.*
> *Dit is die dermnet, die vlies wat ’n baba se gesig by geboorte toemaak. Mense hou dit en droog dit want dis ’n groot suiwering teen die slegte kragte in die lewe. Die mense wat met die helm gebore word, is die wat met die geeste wat afgesterf het, kan praat (Scholtz, 1995:81-86).*[36]

[36] "Ta Vuurmaak was a very old man. How old, no one really knew. His age could only be estimated by the stories he told about his childhood. The children enjoyed Ta Vuurmaak's company greatly. And, he said: Let any child come to the cabin, not only those that look like our people.
My children, Ta Vuurmaak said, some people can see spirits, usually those who are born with the caul.
What is the caul? one asked.

In my mother('s) tongue 'gebore met die helm', born with 'the helmet', refers to a baby born with the caul or 'the cowl', or as some know it, 'behind the veil'. (The Latin *Caput galeatum*, translates as 'head helmet'.) A relatively rare phenomenon (apparently one in 80 000 births), such babies born with a membrane, the amnion, covering the face entirely, like a veil or mask[*2]. Such a person is said to be clairvoyant, or to possess similar supernatural gifts, being able to *see* things that others cannot. Such a child is said to be able to see beyond/through/in-between the realm beyond the physical and the phenomenal, the familiar of omens and traces left behind by those who have passed on. Such a person is also said to be able to speak to those who have already passed on and see figures of people or animals that haunt them. Caulbearers are also said to be able to see the shadowy figure of death before it comes to take someone. The face of the person who will die may appear to them, a funeral procession may pass them by, or a coffin will stand before them. Perhaps, they are thus more attuned to the violence that seeks to make people dis/appear, or perhaps they are more intimately acquainted with the debt of the violence of their forefathers that they carry in the seams of their skin, that turns their bones to chalk. To be born with the supernatural powers of the caul is a common belief in Afrikaans-speaking families. The membrane left over the caulbearers' heads, and by implication their minds, imaginations and sense, serves as a constant reminder of being given birth to, the pain endured by both the mother, and the infant self. It is painful to start existing in the world where air [touch] is hostile and dry, where sounds [ears] are loud and abrupt, where light [eyes] stings the skin.

Or

***2 Membrane**

Some who do not know the value and significance of this membrane discard it in places where it will wither away and become forgotten. Some say that those who are separated from their caul in this manner are unsettled for the rest of their lives but are never able to name what unsettles them.

Those that do understand the significance of the caul keep it. They may dry it out, keep it at home in the folds of a newspaper published on the day of the child's birth, or they bury it in the garden. Some say this is for protection against spirits that mean harm, while others believe that it brings good luck and that the bearer must have it with them or bad luck will fall upon them. Some bearers of the caul leave their caul in the homes of their parents. The parents can then tell what befalls the bearer. For instance, if it is damp, the bearer is sick. When the bearer dies, the membrane is buried with them (Coetzee 1960).

It seems these membranes help their bearers to see and hear the warnings and signs that their ancestors want to communicate to them. It seems these membranes are the thin illusive veils in-between the reality we know and the reality to which our senses have been dulled.

It is the amniotic sac, the membrane that covers a baby's face at birth. People keep it and dry it out because it is a great purification against the malevolent forces in this life. The people who are born with the caul are those who can speak to spirits who have already passed on" (Scholtz, 1995:81-86, my translation).

When emerging from the womb, the child still carries a piece of the mother over their head, blurring boundaries of their sensory perception of self and other, of present and past, of within and without, of here, there and the "elsewhere within here" (Minh-ha, 2016:2). This blurring gives them the ability to embody a curious and unsettling intuition or insight; they are able to remember (the fragment of stuck skin an incongruous 'ripped suture' that joins – re-members – the bodies of mother, and child). This re-membering of what others cannot remember, the (re)memb(e)rane that they carry allows them to remember what their mother remembers, and what her mother remembers and her mother and her mother.

2. Understanding die helm better

> *I was not gebore met die helm but I begin to wonder whether I can return to my mother('s tongue) and draw die helm over my eyes so that I can begin to see anew again, to hear with (re)new(ed) ears, so that I can speak to my ghosts. The ghosts I must consciously acknowledge as my own.*

To understand die helm better, it is useful for us to turn to (some of the very few) examples where this phenomenon appears in South African literary texts. Perhaps, from these examples, we can begin to understand what it means to be born with die helm.

2.1. Die helm as it appears in Achmat Dangor's 'Waiting for Leila'.

The first example is from Achmat Dangor's (2001) short story 'Waiting for Leila' which tells of Samad, a resident of District Six under the Apartheid government, who was gebore met die helm. We first meet Samad in winter in the largely abandoned District Six where "jackhammers [are] picking like crows at his guts. All around him they are breaking down his city, brick by brick, stone for stone" (Dangor, 2001:1). His family decides to move to Johannesburg to find work and a better life but he stays behind, adamant that District Six "is my rock, I cannot leave" (Dangor, 2001:2). Early in the text, Samad describes District Six as a ghost town from which the ghosts of the previous and current residents are "ineradicable" (Dangor, 2001:2). Samad often admonishes the other residents because "they're singing… As if nothing's happening" (Dangor, 2001:1) while the residents, in turn, shun and stigmatise him, angered by his ravings.

Haunted by Leila's absence from his life, by the violence of "Jan van Riebeeck, and the privileged members of his entourage" who "buggered… our whole history…up" (Dangor, 2001:8), Samad approaches Suleiman the Dhukkum to commune with his ancestor, Benjamin the Malaccan, who was killed by Dutch colonisers for his role in the resistance against slavery. Suleiman agrees after some coercion and starts the ritual. As Suleiman chants, the sky changes and the moon hides behind the clouds. Samad is overwhelmed by cold as "shades and shadows surge all around him" and he feels as if his feet "were chained by some invisible force" (Dangor, 2001:10). Suleiman creates an invisible circle in which Samad "could see…shadowy, eyeless faces, some of which he vaguely remember[s]" (Dangor, 2001:11). Benjamin the Malaccan appears and Samad relives the moment Benajmin "dragged his lithe body to the Kasteel, where for three years he had watched the moon's progress across the walls of his cell" (Dangor, 2001:11). Samad then becomes "the voice and agent of Benjamin's son Ali, and in this guise swears vengeance against the 'Meester' who has tortured Benjamin" (Field, 2011:111). Dangor further unsettles the reader by allowing the reader to experience these shifts in Samad's identity. In the first part of the story, the focaliser vacillates abruptly between Samad and Ali with no clear distinction between these characters. These sudden narrative moves begin to blur the boundaries between Ali's and Samad's identities and between past and present. The story-telling mode also often fluctuates between omniscient collective and first-person narrators, and Free Indirect Discourse making it unclear whether the reader is reading Samad or a different character's thoughts or dialogue. These narrative techniques blur the boundaries between Samad's inner world and the outside world and take the reader along as Dangor through Samad "blasts through the rational, linearly temporal, and discrete spatiality of our conventional notions of cause and effect, past and present, conscious and unconscious" (Gordon, 2008:66). What is clear to the reader is that Samad sees and experiences the world differently from most which is again confirmed by the description of his ability to "conjure ghouls and djinns" (Dangor, 2001:5).

Samad can also be read as a queer figure, despite some of his homophobic remarks (see **Notes on queerness and the archive** for an understanding of how I use the term queer). While in prison, two inmates speak about him saying "'Ah soe! They going to hang him.' 'Ja, he was always a queer bogger'" (Dangor 2001:66). He is marginalised even in his community of marginal people, which is clear from the manner in which he is shunned by his community. Yet he disrupts the community from his place marginality through his ravings and admonishment of the complacency of some of the other residents. Later, he finds a home among

the many queer figures of society who live on the edges of the community, such as a coloured drag queen named Honey, an ageing sex-worker named Calypso, and a dandy named Giordes. He refuses to be shaped by the conventions of his wider community, which is evident from the ways in which he does not keep quiet when asked to. He is also always oddly present and absent in this reality while being present and absent in the world of Ali and Benjamin the Malaccan.

It is in part 3 of the story, which describes his birth, where the readers are given a clue as to why Samad inhabits the world in this curious, queer manner. At birth, the nurse who delivers him exclaims "Hy is met die helm gebore" [He has been born with the caul/helm] (Dangor, 2001:23, my translation). She rips the membrane from his face and discards it. His father responds saying "He will suffer. Children born with the helm see too much, feel too much. They come to a bad end". He describes those born with the caul as "Doemed. Blerry gefoetered all their lives"[37] (Dangor, 2001:23). But Samad and his grandmother ignore "this dire prophecy" and, after his birth, the old womxn "rose from the gloom of the kitchen (where she ensconced herself in the deep-backed chair many years ago and abandoned the world) and shuffled between the weary nurses to retrieve the discarded membrane" (Dangor, 2001:23). The grandmother understands the importance of this fold of skin and what it means for Samad's life to be gebore met die helm:

> They heard her dig in the yard, groaning and gasping, but refusing all help. Thus my life was consecrated by the arthritic hands of an old harridan who buried the membrane of my miracle deep in the crypt of household ash, in a backyard beneath a tenement staircase that led above to the whorehouse of the world. And placed a rock on the membrane to prevent some hungry city dog from disinterring the spirit of my uniqueness… and the membrane bled from the weight of the stone, and flowed into dead earth, and stirred the forgotten seeds of our immorality.
>
> And I was born, blooming upon this holy river… this was not the bloom of corn, the greening of dull pastures where the gods of men are born. This was the union of flesh and stone. A regte kaapsedoring. And it shall not perish (Dangor, 2001:23-24).

Being gebore met die helm seems to give Samad the ability to stand in the "gap between personal and social, public and private, objective and subjective" (Gordon, 2008:98) at the margins and on edges of/in-between the (un)known and (un)knowable. As Loren Kruger (2002:39) notes:

[37] "Doomed. Bloody troubled/marked"

> Samad's allusions to a slave rebel ancestor, Benjamin of Malacca, like his appeals to Leila, flicker across the narrative like screen memories or "cover stories", masking more than they might explain about this character, but their very elusiveness evokes a history that has yet to be written.

Indeed, "Samad's world was peopled by mysterious, almost ghostlike characters" (Dangor, 2001:27) and his knowledge and recognition of the many ghosts of our historically haunted society affords him the awareness of the gap that Gordon (2008:41) describes as an "organized and elaborate symptom". Samad's helm allows him to see and recognise that, as Gordon points out, this gap is misleading. In meeting with his ancestors, Samad also "[relives] events in all their vividness, originality, and violence… touch[es] the ghosts or the ghostly matter of things: the ambiguities, the complexities of power and personhood, the violence and the hope, the looming and receding actualities, the shadows of our selves and our society" (Gordon, 2008:134). Thus, through being a bearer of die helm, Samad is made aware of "paths [that] have been disavowed, left behind, covered over and [that] remain unseen" (Gordon, 2008:41), a spectral knowledge which allows him to enter and see the world through "a different door, the door of the uncanny, the door of the fragment, the door of the shocking parallel" (Gordon, 2008:66). Samad, who spent "three years at the university" (Dangor, 2001:41), keeps the scattered remains of a bookish life in the house of his parents. The "inventory of [his] riches" includes James Joyce's *Ulysses* as well as some of the work of "[coloured Cape poet] James Matthews lying on top of TS Eliot, in an obscene embrace" (Dangor, 2001:16). "Fragments of these authors' [writing]" says Loren Kruger (2002:38), "and of apparently authorless accounts of rebel slaves at the colonial Cape of Storms, whom Samad appears to take as his forefathers, colour the narrative" emphasising Samad's and the text's ability to enter through this door of the uncanny. Thus, even the narrative form of the text stands in the same gap Samad occupies. As Loren Kruger (2002:37-38) confirms:

> *Waiting for Leila*… eludes the grasp of the outside reader looking to identify with the moral certainties of anti-apartheid feeling or even for the bearings of specific location and agency… It is this absence of what might be called *anti-apartheid pathos* that makes *Waiting for Leila* a post-anti-apartheid text… The life and death of Samad cannot be 'blamed' on history - or on any single oppressor identified with apartheid - but they are nonetheless connected to it.

Thus the queer form of the text ruptures the categorical boundaries of classification, and of presence and absence. It is as if the text embodies being born with die helm and invites readers to draw die helm over their own eyes and experience the "quickening experience of haunting" (Gordon, 2008:67) through Samad as he faces his ghosts. In this process, the apparently given delineations and foci of Apartheid are disrupted, unsettled, and the text opens into a more elusive, spectral body of knowledge.

This is an important example from literature that can help us understand die helm, even though this is the experience of a coloured man, and my intention is not to appropriate, or to deny that the ghosts that Samad may see will likely be somewhat different from the ghosts that I may encounter, due to the different pasts from which our respective births emerged.

I cannot attempt to undo
what my ancestors have done.
I cannot eradicate haunting.
Ghosts will haunt as ghosts
Will haunt, their haunting a reminder
of pasts we must not repeat.
Samad. Chantelle. These pasts
are intertwined, yet my ghosts
may be the very ghosts
that made ghosts of Samad's
ancestors and Samad's ghosts
will haunt me differently
than they haunt him.

***3 Paljas:**

"Paljas is die ou Slamse woord vir toorgoed. 'n Paljas is 'n sakkie met toorgoedjies wat saamgedra is vir helende krag. Wat minder bekend is, is dat dit ook die ou Boerewoord is vir 'n nar, en ook vir die bonatuurlike.

Die HAT (1994) gee die volgende inskrywing:

> 'Toor' 1. Iets wonderbaarliks verrig deur geheimsinnige handeling; op bonatuurlike wyse iets teennatuurliks tot stand bring."

[Paljas is an old Cape Malay Islamic word for magical objects. A paljas is a bag filled with magical objects that is carried around for healing power. What is less known is that it is also a Boereword for a clown, and for the supernatural.

The HAT (1994) provides the following entry:

> 'Toor' 1. Achieve something miraculous through secretive means; bring about something unnatural through supernatural means.]

(Nel, 2003: 2, my translation)

In my own study, I want specifically to consider how Afrikaners speak to their ghosts. Therefore I turn to an example of the phenomena of met die helm gebore that I remember from my childhood within an Afrikaner family. The example

concerns the Afrikaans film *Paljas* (1998)[*3], written by Chris Barnard and directed by Katinka Heyns.[38]

2.2. Die helm as it appears in Paljas.

The film tells the story of Hendrik McDonald, a railroad worker and his family who live at a remote station in a rural town named Toorwater (which directly translated means 'magic water'). Toorwater is an arid town described in the script as "the sort of place where trains do not stop" (Barnard, 1998:4, my translation). This description foreshadows the spiritual isolation of the characters in the film and the ways in which the town is stalled in time as the world moves on and passes them by. The family consists of Hendrik, Hendrik's wife Katrina, and their children Emma and Willem. From the outset, it is clear that the family is unhappy. Katrina and her husband often argue and their marriage is slowly disintegrating. The family members rarely communicate with each other; Emma no longer plays the piano and increasingly turns in on herself, and young Willem does not speak due to an undisclosed (or perhaps unspeakable) trauma two years earlier. They live their isolated lives separated from the rest of the town whose community has shunned them and gossips about their social class, their (perceived) otherness in behaviour, their poverty, and their spatial isolation from the town. As their isolation slowly destroys the family, so their communication begins to disintegrate. They start speaking to each other less and less, or say the wrong thing at the wrong time. One day, out of nowhere, almost magically, a circus train stops in town. This changes their lives irrevocably (Barnard, 1998:19). A clown, named Manuel who has (or may have) escaped the circus, stays behind when the circus leaves, becomes friends with Willem and teaches him magic tricks. It is through Manuel's magical presence in Willem's life that he starts speaking again and it is through Willem's healing and transformation that the family in turn transforms and heals (Nel, 2003).

The first time we meet Manuel, he appears in a magical and queer way. From out of a dry and empty Karoo veld, the back and head of an elephant materialises, and once the elephant comes over the hill, along comes a skipping clown clothed in a colourful outfit and adorned with

[38] Notably, in the introduction to the script of *Paljas,* Chris Barnard explains that he wrote the play after Trix Pienaar (re)told him a short story written by Abraham de Vries entitled 'Skaduwees tussen Skaduwees' (Shadows in-between Shadows). While in De Vries' story the clown is not a clown but an Italian prisoner of war, Pienaar remembered this character as a clown and told the story to Barnard in this way. From this (re)remembering, based on this (re)telling *Paljas* was birthed. See 'The Blue Frog' in Trinh T. Minh-ha's (2016) *Elsewhere, Within Here* for more on the value of imperfection in the transmission of stories.

clown make-up. “Die nar se verskyning hou nie verband met die werklikheid nie” [the clown’s appearance holds no connection to reality] writes Nel (2003:11), “hy ’speel’ sy ‘lewensrol’ as nar uit teen die leë Karoolandskap sonder toeskouer of doel, en hierdie magiese alleenspel bevestig waarskynlik sy persoonlike vryheid” [he ‘plays’ his ‘life’s role’ as a clown against the setting of the empty Karoo landscape without audience or purpose, and this magical game he plays alone confirms his personal freedom]. Willem hides Manuel in the buitekamer (outbuilding/shed), “’n marginale ruimte op die rand van die gemarginaliseerde ruimte van die gesin” [a marginal space on the edges of the marginalised space of the family] (Nel, 2003:10) and it is in this shed that Willem and Manuel draw pictures, play, perform magic tricks, and play music. Through the unbounded creativity that they can express here in this liminal transitional space, Willem’s inward world is transformed. Notably, Nel (2003:10, my translation) observes that the figure of the clown has two roles in a drama: “om te vermaak, en om die waarheid op onaanvegbare wyse te laat blyk” [to entertain, and to reveal the truth in an irrefutable manner]. This is precisely what Manuel does in *Paljas*. What is strange, though, is that it is only Willem who initially sees Manuel, and the viewer is unsure whether he exists in this reality or (an)other alternate reality to which only Willem has access. The viewer learns why only Willem might be seeing Manuel soon after their first encounter when Willem starts drawing clowns and his parents see the drawings. Hendrik asks Katrina “Jong, is die kind nie met die helm gebore nie?” [Was this child not born with the caul?] (Barnard, 1998:30). Katrina neither confirms nor denies this and avoids the question, leaving it to linger with the viewer. Following this first encounter, there are various scenes of Willem and Manuel playing together in the veld, in the outbuilding, in the bales of hay, and on the windmills. They eat together, dance together, run together, and do magic tricks together to the sound of the clown playing two notes over and over on his concertina “like an incantation” (Barnard, 1998:34, my translation). But it is always only the two of them.

Both Manuel the clown and Willem can be read as queer figures that haunt the town. (turn to **Notes on queerness and the archive** for a clarification of how I use the term queer). Like Antjie Somers, Manuel is queer in his appearance and his manner, he refuses to conform to societal conventions and for this he shunned (turn to **The Heaped Bones of August** to find out who Antjie Somers is). Later, the townspeople even hunt the clown down, marking his difference as Satanic and the pastor of the town chases him out of church. Likewise, Willem is shunned or othered for not speaking. At home his father often stares at him “soos mens vir iets kyk waaroor jy nuuskierig is of wat jy nie verstaan nie” [like you would look at something

about which you are curious or which you do not understand] (Barnard, 1998:5). At school, other children often taunt Willem and make fun of him by biting their tongues and making rhythmic 'hn-hnnn-hn-hnnn' sounds as if to imply his tongue has been cut out. Like the travellers of Boontjieskraal, Manuel and Willem disrupt the centre from the margins, and Manuel asserts his personal freedom against the backdrop of a barren Afrikaner town that wishes to confine each person to predetermined categories. These designations he disrupts, slips in and out of, blurring cultural doxa and edicts (turn to **He who stands guard at the door, The humming soil of Boontjieskraal,** and **Hunting: the figures of witches and Queers**). Their queerness and haunting is further emphasised by their present absences and absent presences. For instance, on one occasion Willem can only see Manuel's colourful juggling balls in the air. First one ball, then two, then three, as the balls fly higher and higher. Only once all of his juggling balls are in the air, does he appear, dressed in his clown suit. Willem is often also absent from home with no one in his family knowing where he is, yet he is always present in the conversations they have about him. Often, he will also appear out of nowhere to break the tension with magic tricks when his parents are fighting (Barnard, 1998:35). Their present absence, absent presence is highlighted particularly well in a scene described in the script:

> Montage van die twee wat haas-haas speel, net-net sigbaar reg op die rug van die horison. Die horison is laag en die res is blou lug. Die nar wip voor, gevolg deur die kind. Iewers is die konsertina se eentonige herhaling van die twee note wat al voorheen gehoor is. Die twee note is presies op maat van hulle wip. Hulle wip van links na regs op die horison tot hulle wegraak. Die horison is leeg.
>
> Dan kom hulle van regs na links terug. Maar nou het hulle ander klere aan, en die kind hardloop voor. Hy speel die konsertina: twee note oor en oor. Hulle verdwyn regs en die musiek raak weg.
>
> [Montage of the two pretending to be bunnies, only just visible on the spine of the horizon. The horizon is low and the rest blue sky. The clown is hopping in front, followed by the child. Somewhere there is the sound of the concertina's monotonous repetition of the two notes heard before. The two notes are precisely in tune with the beat of their hops. They hop from left to right on the horizon until they disappear.
>
> The horizon is empty.
>
> Then, they come back from right to left. But now they are wearing different clothes, and the child is running ahead. He is playing the concertina: two notes repeated over and over. They disappear to the right and the music fades.] (Barnard, 1998: 66, my translation)

That this scene takes place on the horizon, emphasises not only the characters' elusive nature, but could also be highlighting the respective, sometimes different, often overlapping marginal space they occupy on the edges of society. The horizon is also a space that is in-between here and there, in-between the outside of space and the here-ness of the earth, at dusk and dawn it is a strip of light that fades in(-)between the darkness. As they appear, disappear and reappear, playing on the horizon, their own in-betweenness is shown to viewers[39].

On a further occasion, after Willem witnesses another argument between his parents, he disappears again. The film shifts from his family looking for him, to a scene of him and the clown together in the shed. The clown is trying to entertain the child with a chicken dance but Willem just stares at him quietly. The clown asks Willem to write down what is bothering him, but then Willem starts crying. The clown replies:

> Nee-nee-nee-nee-nee-nee. Nie trane nie. Die lewe is te kort vir trane. Ons speel liewer. Speel is altyd beter as trane. Altyd. *(Die nar voel in sy sakke rond en haal 'n grimeerpotlood uit. Hy verf twee groot boë bokant Willem se oë.)* Kom. Kom ons teken iets. *(Hy soek in sy broeksak en haal 'n ander kleur uit. Hy verf Willem se mond.)* Kom ons teken die trane weg. Ons vee die ou Willem uit en ons teken 'n nuwe Willem.
> [No-no-no-no-no-no. No tears. Life is too short for tears. We should play instead. Playing is better than tears. Always. (*The clown rummages through his pockets and takes out a make-up pencil. He paints two big arches above Willem's eyes*.) Come. Come let's draw something. (*He searches in his trouser pocket and takes another colour out. He paints Willem's mouth.)* Come, let's draw away the tears. We'll rub out the old Willem and we'll draw a new Willem.] (Barnard, 1998:43, my translation)

This scene highlights the centrality of play in Willem's transformation. Nel (2003:14) notes that playing distances Willem from his reality for a while and the moment of play functions as

[39] See Trinh T. Minh-ha's (2016) 'Twilight Gray, Middle Gray' in *Elsewhere, Within Here* for more on the in-betweenness of the horizon.

***4 Clown**

While the clown's irreverence to society can be read as an assertion of his personal freedom, the colourful mask he wears is also a shield from the world that hides his vulnerability. Indeed, behind the colourful mask, one might find someone in the midst of a crisis, and/or someone that does not neatly fit into the categories of societal norms. An example of this is Pieter Dirk Uys' character, Evita Bezuidenhout, whom he often refers to as his "clown" (Sizemore-Barber, 2016). He dresses up in drag and puts on a mask to mock South African politics. The character is the matronly, aristocratic and "demure wife of NP Member of Parliament Dr JJ De V Bezuidenhout" (Dirk-Uys, 2018) and "South African ambassador to the independent black homeland Republic of Bapetikosweti" who, primarily through cabaret directed at white audiences, mocks the NP's hypocrisy and apartheid policies. April Sizemore-Barber (2016:200) notes how Evita's "gender performance–her immaculately coiffed hair and makeup and Uys's total commitment to making her real, both onstage and in public spaces–is part of his critique, creating a vivid, real person with a history whose supposed gentility and believability only underscores the banality of apartheid's evil". Pieter Dirk Uys himself is a gay white Jewish Afrikaans man. He is thus vulnerable to anti-Semitism, but in South Africa, receives the privileges of whiteness because of his whiteness, this while being shunned for being gay. Thus, by mocking society, the mask becomes his means of mediating his otherness in a world that shuns him while critiquing that same society for its prejudices.

Not knowing what lies beneath the mask and the clown's subsequent (un)knowability in their familiarity renders them as a queer figure. Their perpetual insistence on smiling and almost manic joy is unsettling and makes them uncanny and sinister figures. What is perhaps most unsettling is what they reveal lurking beneath our own masks, much like what Uys' mask revealed about white South Africans. Their masks allow us to see ourselves and our society differently. Indeed, the mask seems to be a mirror that mocks and critiques through play and entertainment.

The clown's mask, like Manuel's mask, is also the boundary between the clown persona and the person performing. The mask is thus a transition between the magical world of play and fantasy, and mundane reality. The transitionality of the mask gives the clown access to a world of play and fantasy that allows them to mediate their otherness while critiquing the society that others them. In many ways, the mask of a clown is much like *die helm.*

a 'play' between his two worlds, his two realities that are often perceived as opposite to one another:

> Die afwisselende verhouding tot die speelwêreld en die reële werklikheid konstitueer 'n bestaansvorm wat "spel" genoem kan word. Hierdie dubbelsinnige wesensaard van spel manifesteer dikwels in die opposisie-pare wat die beoefening van die spel oproep en wat mekaar op markante wyse komplementeer: triomf en neerlaag, vreugde en verslaentheid/hartseer, leeglê en daadkrag, lojaliteit en afguns, lomp en rats, spel en erns, selfs lewe en dood. Vergelyk ook die paradoksale van die hanswors: dit wat nie ernstig geneem word nie, moét soms ernstig opgeneem word. [The alternating relationship to the play world and reality constitutes a form of existence that can be called 'play'. This ambiguous nature of play often manifests itself in the oppositional pairs that the practice of play calls to mind and complement each other in significant ways: triumph and defeat, joy and dismay/sadness, idleness and vigour, loyalty and envy, clumsy and agile, play and seriousness, even life and death. Also compare the paradoxicals of the clown: that which is not taken seriously must sometimes be taken seriously.][*4]

Playing thus both gives access to an alternate reality and is itself an in-between, magical expanse where fantasies can be expressed. What appear to be opposing differences in the world

begin to melt into one; that which is constructed as different is shown to be closely interlinked, two sides of the same coin. Indeed, it becomes clear that one cannot exist without the other. It is through the in-between, magical act of play that Willem accesses this alternate reality, and can thus ultimately heal: "Montage van die tekenproses. Afgewissel met Hendrik hulle se soektog na die kind. Willem al hoe meer ingenome, verander van 'n bedrukte knaap na 'n nar wat vir sy eie gesig in 'n ou stuk spieël staan en lag." [Montage of the drawing process. Alternated with Hendrik and the family searching for the child. Willem, more and more impressed, changes from a depressed boy to a clown who stands laughing at his own face reflecting in an old piece of mirror.] (Barnard, 1998:44, my translation)

But the clown knows that Willem cannot live in the magical world of play only, he must take what he has learnt to his family, and thus the clown urges him to return to his family. He leaves the clown, face still painted, with assurance from the clown that tomorrow they can play again, and returns to his family. At home, Hendrik embraces him tearfully and Willem rubs his finger over his painted face and draws a big dot on each of his father's cheeks. When Katrina comes in and sits next to them, he draws a big smile on her face. For the first time, we see Hendrik's own vulnerability showing as tears stream down his face. It is as if Willem, drawing on their faces with his fingers, using paint transferred from his own painted clown features, is drawing them into his world via intimate touch, inviting them to play with him and discover that just beyond our reality lies a more magical one that he hopes they will begin to see as he does. Much like Samad, Willem is aware that the gap between the magical world of the supernatural and reality as we know it is a gap that is constructed, and by drawing on his parents' faces, he is hoping to make them sense this too. Indeed, the very first word Willem speaks to his family is 'speel'[play][*5] when he asks his sister to play the piano. The violence he witnessed that made him stop speaking, could only be healed by engaging the in-between world; through this liminal space he could find language again or, perhaps, find another kind of language than the conventionalised. From this in-between world, he could learn the language he needed to articulate his experience in the world as we know it, language that he could not find before, language that has been taken from him by an unnamed (and perhaps unspeakable event). And this moment signals the beginning of healing in the family, as they begin to communicate more often with one another. This in-between world of play has thus also given Willem and his family a language with which they can articulate what has previously been unspeakable and unlanguaged. It is also a haptic and affective language since the family affectionately hug one

another more often and bridge the gap that used to exist in-between them. With this vocabulary of the in-between, these poetics of play, they can begin to sense what haunts and unsettles them, and face the ghosts that people their family (turn to **The politics of *gavsryheid* revisited** and **Nou weet ek net jy sal my gevange hou** for my own exploration of finding such a language).

The reunion is however interrupted when the police come to the house with packs of twenty, thirty dogs to search the property to find Willem. When they see he has returned, they follow the dogs who charge to the shed. Willem runs after them, thinking that they might find Manuel. Instead, they find the drawings on the wall, colourful drawings of jokers and bright circles and crosses and squares, a dog or dragon spewing fire, a giant snake and a clown "maar soos Picasso dit sou geteken het" [drawn like Picasso would have drawn it] (Barnard, 1998:52, my translation). Upon seeing this, Hendrik exclaims, "Ek sê vir my vrou – ek wonder is hy nie met die helm gebore nie? Hy sien goeters wat ons nie sien nie."[I said to my wife – I wonder if he wasn't born with the caul? He sees things that we do not see.] (Barnard, 1998:52, my translation). Again, reference is made to the fact that Willem's different way of seeing the world is due to the possibility he might have been born with the caul. And the viewer is still unsure whether it is only Willem who can see the clown.

***5 Sp(i)eel (bietjie saam met my) or mirror mirror on the wall:**

The Afrikaans word for play is speel. Strikingly similar to this word is spieël, the Afrikaans word for mirror. These words even echo one another in pronunciation. Mirrors allow those who stare into them to see (the reflection of) what is behind and what is before them. A mirror also allows those who look into it to see (the reflection of) their face and body, see in what ways they mirror their mother, father, and relations before these, how they are sown/sewn into the seams of a family's skin. Some say that our reflections in the mirror represent our souls or spirits. Thus, when we look in the mirror we can reflect on our faces and bodies; what marks (are on) those faces and bodies, what lines are etched into that skin, and we also reflect on the state of our spirit. When a mirror breaks, our reflections in that mirror break too and some say that the spiritual damage this causes brings seven years of bad luck that the mirror will carry in its cracks. Some say that mirrors are a portal to a (supernatural) world. If our spirits are what we see reflected in the mirror, then perhaps the reality that the mirror is a portal to is the spirit world, and the mirror is the in-between of our carnate reality and the spirit world. Some say that mirrors can be used to call on spirits. By saying the name of the spirit three times in the mirror, the spirit will appear reflected in the mirror. Our reflections are then no longer reflections of our faces but the face/s of the spirit. Our reflections are queered, and/or our queerness is reflected in the mirror. The mirror, like die helm, seems to be a (porous) membrane between our reality and the spirit world. Like the clown in *Paljas*, the mirror may thus reveal some truth(s) about us (and our ghosts) as we reflect in the mirror, through our reflection. Since speel, as is clear from Paljas, gives access to and is an in-between world where we can become more acquainted with our ghosts and/or our own in-betweenness, queerness, otherness, speel is a sort of spieël.

I want to suggest that it is because Willem is a bearer of the caul that initially only he can see Manuel, this magical queer figure. Like Samad, Willem has the gift of 'sight', a psychic power to see what lies beyond the emperical, things that I have been trained by Cartesian dualism, and Enlightenment thinking not to see. Like Samad, Willem sees the world through "a different

door, the door of the uncanny, the door of the fragment, the door of the shocking parallel" (Gordon, 2008: 66). It is only once the clown chooses to show himself that everyone else starts seeing him. The town's dominee comes to visit the McDonalds' to admonish them for the drawings on the wall in the shed, since the townsfolk have marked these as satanic. But Hendrik insists: "hier bly mense in hierdie huis…Ons is miskien arm, ja, en ons is seker nie baie geleerd nie, en ons het foute. Maar ons is mense" [people live in this house. Yes, we may be poor and we may not be very educated, and we have our flaws. But we are people] (Barnard, 1998: 68, my translation). The implication is that the town has othered the family to such an extent that they feel dehumanized because of their difference. After over-hearing the conversation between his father and the dominee, Willem asks Manuel if drawing on the wall and painting one's face is satanic (Barnard, 1998:69). Manuel borrows Willem's bicycle and decides to attend church in his full clown outfit. The clown chooses to transfigure from his (parallel) world and presence himself in the material world of the community. But his contact with the social order as we know it is a violent collision that could cost him his life. Manuel is sitting quietly in the church, but the dominee chases him out; after this, the townspeople hunt him down and shoot him, in an attempt to eliminate this uncanny absent/presence that has been haunting them. Indeed, the queerness of the circus, the clown, and (what) his mask (reveals) unsettles this town that would prefer to remain frozen in time with a (supposedly) firm grip on reality through the ability to categorise. Yet Manuel and Willem elude this grip (turn to **Hunting: figures of witches and Queers, The Humming Soil of Boontjieskraal**, and **The Heaped Bones of August** where you may meet more such humxns and encounter their encounters with the world.) This encounter emphasises people's hostility towards that which is other to them, that which is out of familiarity's reach, that which haunts the social borders. The family nurses the clown back to health and while sitting at his bedside, Hendrik states: "Ek is Hendrik McDonald. En ek mág ek wees. En jy mag Emma wees. En Ma en Willem en almal. Nollie Kemp is Nollie Kemp en klaar. Ons is ons met al ons skete en al." [I am Hendrik McDonald. And I am allowed to be me. And you are allowed to be Emma. And Mom and Willem and everyone. Nollie Kemp is Nollie Kemp, end of story. We are ourselves with all our flaws and all.] (Barnard, 1998:80, my translation). In this moment, Hendrik no longer feels the need to affirm their humxnity despite their difference, and instead affirms their humxnity precisely because of their difference. As Nel (2003:16, my translation) notes, "Hendrik's words are a (re)confirmation of dignity and self-worth, thus recognition and acknowledgement of personal identity. Hein Viljoen (1998:17) provides us with a good summary: 'To be human is to realise your own strangeness and existence; your own alterity and identity'". The analogous ambiguousness of

Manuel and Willem, the language they have found through the pleasure and spontaneity of play as an affective phenomenology located in and birthed from the in-between, has given the McDonalds a medium in which to articulate and affirm their humxnity through their difference. It is through entertainment and play that Manuel reveals something about the McDonalds and the townspeople that was hidden before.

With his work completed, Manuel decides to go back to the circus saying "Ek mis die ou groot tent" [I miss the big old tent] (Barnard, 1998:84, my translation). This is his return to his in-between world of play. But because Willem is a bearer of the caul, he was able to encounter the in-between world of Manuel and that encounter has "wrench[ed] [his family] from [their] particular kind of stupor, [has] shift[ed] [their] investments away from the private world…" (Gordon, 2008:134). Once Manuel has left, the family starts engaging with the community again. They go to a community dance in the town and, at first, the community does not accept them and throws tomatoes at them, humiliating them so much that they go home. But later, when members of the community come to the McDonalds' house to apologise for their behaviour, the McDonalds take them into their home, and Willem does magic tricks and plays the concertina while everyone dances together. Thus, gradually, Willem is also bringing the in-between world of play to the town, a world to which he has access more readily (I suggest) because he is a bearer of the caul. It is through being gebore met die helm that Willem can access this world of play, fantasy, story, magic and, like/through Manuel, he can bring the haptic and affective language he learnt not only to his family but to his community, too. This leads the community to accept the McDonalds precisely because of their difference. Together, they begin to dance and they "move… away from 'explaining away' the forces that run through [their] veins" and especially the McDonalds move toward "*feeling [their] way deeper and deeper… until [they] do feel what is at stake"* (Gordon, 2008:134, her italics).

What becomes clear from these texts is that die helm enables its bearer to follow the ghost, the in-between or absent/present being, like Samad did, and like Willem did. The caul enables its birth bearer to be receptive to (even to seek out) haunting, "to touch the ghost or the ghostly matter of things: the ambiguities, the complexities of power and personhood, the violence and the hope, the looming and receding actualities, the shadows of our selves and our society" (Gordon, 2008:135). Bearers of die helm are or can become intimately acquainted with their ghosts, or even their own in-betweenness. They engage with the in-between, speak to it and from it, look it in the eye and listen to it. We see both Willem and Samad welcome the ghosts,

extending to beings of the in-between a form of gasvry accommodation. Their hospitable encounters with the in-between actively enable their attempts to move toward a future that is more liveable, and more just.

I wonder if we can draw *die helm* over our eyes, and use it to see those things that we have been trained not to see? Might this practice thus help us "define the means by which society can be rendered adequate to the full breadth of its potential" (Gordon, 2008:xix)? I want to suggest that die helm enables its bearer to do what Avery Gordon asks of us in her *Ghostly Matters*, which is to speak to our ghosts and acknowledge them, and also to be more intimately acquainted with our own in-betweenness. Even for those of us not born with die helm, is it possible to return to our mothers('tongue), to our fathers(' lore), to return where we came from, retrieve our helms and draw them over our eyes in order, at last, to begin *to see*? Trinh T. Minh-ha (2016:56) writes that "to develop the ability to receive with more than one's eyes or ears is to expand that part of oneself which is receptive but can remain atrophied, almost closed, when its potential lies dormant". While physically it may be impossible to retrieve our atrophied helms, and if some of us were not born with the gift of this portent, perhaps it is still possible to learn the valuable range of sight and sensory susceptibility and insight that helms are reputed to hold.

3. The retrieval of our helms: (re)ca(u)lling, (re)collecting, (re)membering, (re)telling folk stories

In these twilight days, my father no longer tells our stories. He left them in the corridor when he hooked his green jacket onto a tree and left his boots in the corridor untouched.

"In each of us, in varying proportions, there is part of yesterday's man," writes Durkheim (1912:11), and "the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result". The stories, languages and cultures of mothers and fathers, and grandmothers and grandfathers, and their ancestors before that, continue to shape us. These are some of many legacies they have left for us. In a paper on ghost theory, Orrin Wang (2007:203) writes that legacies are intertwined with ghosts "so much so that, inevitably a legacy is also what a ghost leaves". Thus, legacies, or their broader ambits, meaning cultures, are and can never be separated from their ghosts. While it is clear that ghosts bequeath haunting, what is less obvious is that this haunting as vitalised spirit life is given animated presence

through being spoken of, told, and retold in the form of stories. These are the stories told by our parents, and grandparents and their relatives before that, stories which official history often casts aside as 'old wives' tales' or folklore or superstition. But these stories, in which ghosts leave their traces, as in the accounts of Willem and Samad and die helm, potentially allow access to a noumenal reality, one to which our senses have been dulled by the demands of reason and rationality that cast doubt upon intuition, imagination, apprehension and ghostly knowing as valid forms of knowledge. Storytelling is part of this ghostly transfer, at once substantial yet insubstantial, a calling/cauling into ephemeral but alluring and also enduring being. "It is precisely in storytelling that one is said to encounter the genius of a people" writes Minh-ha (2016:99), and "[t]o (re)tell stories is 'to enter into the constant recreation of the world, of community, of mankind.' Talking therefore brings the impossible within reach". Thus, the stories of our families and cultures across generations, bring us closer to that in-between to which die helm gives access', because stories and their telling "contribute to widening the horizon of one's imagination; to constantly shifting the frontier between reality and fantasy; and to questioning, through the gifts of the so-called supernatural and unusual, the limits of all that is thought to be 'ordinary' and 'believable'" (Minh-ha, 2016:99). Stories are also "a people's own description of themselves" (Dundes, 1969:471); how a people narrate their understanding of the world, and their experiences of the world. Thus, those who are reading, seeing, listening to such stories of people can access a way of understanding a people and their culture/s from the inside out (Dundes, 1969). Importantly, reading, listening, seeing, telling the stories of my people[*5], the stories birthed from my mother('s) tongue, (stories that I may have forgotten, never heard, or cast aside as useless) is to look into the mirror, to look into die sp(i)eel, for folktales are "a mirror of culture and it is a mirror well worth looking into" (Dundes, 1969:482). In this mirror, I see my own reflection better, I see how I am the reflection of (and shaped by) those that came before. In this mirror, I can see the ghosts that are intertwined with my culture. I can see my ghosts. Notably, both Willem and Samad have a moment of awakening after looking in the mirror. For instance, in a moment of play, Willem peers in a shard of a broken mirror and laughs at his own reflection in his clown make-up, a stark contrast to his usually quiet and melancholic demeanour. The moment he looks in the mirror, he begins to see himself in a different light, a recognition released in him through

***5 My people**

This is always a multitude and a multiplicity of people. I live woven together in-between different worlds peopled by different people. I am womxn, I am Queer, I am Afrikaner. I am queer womxn, I am Queer Afrikaner, I am Afrikaner womxn. I am Queer Afrikaner womxn. And it is the stories that lie in-between these three words, that breath in the pauses between these three words, that are the stories of my people.

seeing his own queer reflection in the (broken) mirror. Similarly, while looking in the mirror, Samad hears the words "You cannot escape your lineage" (Dangor, 2001:17) echoing in his mind. His memory is awakened and he perceives "in the cracked mirror the graven image of a ghost from yesteryear" which "he recognised [as] the young face of his father" (Dangor, 2001:17). Musing on the unsettling sight, he contrasts himself to his father whose "eyes still gleamed wildly": "How the line has weakened through the years" (Dangor, 2001:17). He is unsure and doubtful about his place in his family lineage at first, but soon he embraces the ghosts of his lineage: "Where are the black-faced heroes who were Kings and Princes, even though they were pressed into slavery by their captors? But I am the resurrection of that seed... I am Ali, son of Benjamin the Malaccan" (Dangor, 2001:17). He then says "Meester I am coming for you", signalling the moment he begins to face his ghosts and confront the 'Meesters' who disappeared his ancestors. The moment of looking in the mirror is a moment of seeing where he comes from which lends him a greater awareness of himself. And it is thus through the tales of my people that I can begin to see anew again, hear with ears that listen beyond speech. By extension, as I am suggesting, folktales, the stories of a people, die stories van 'n volk, like (die) sp(i)eel and die helm, give access to and are an in-between world that "bring(s) the impossible within reach and mak(es) us realize with poignancy that *material reality is only one dimension of reality*; tales address our longing of a more equitable world built on our struggle as well as on our dreams, our aspirations and actions for peace" (Minh-ha, 2016:18, her italics). I want to suggest that perhaps retrieving our helms means (re)turning to Ta Vuurmaak, our mothers, and grandmothers, our fathers and grandfathers, and *listening* to the stories they can tell us, the stories we have forgotten. This is not to romanticise; the De Wet family, for instance, will also have their long history of family story, and these will not easily cohere with those of other cultures. And yet, I hold on to the sense that an openness to storying can enable more complex relations to received history. Perhaps (re)turning to some of the(ir) things we have discarded, ignored (or destroyed) from our cultures and/or languages as "fallacy, untruth, error" (Dundes 1969:472) in the name of "Enlightenment reason" could be a kind of retrieval of our helms, and through this we can begin to remember what those who came before us remember.

And with that, I wish to return to my mother, my father, and theirs before that, and listen to our stories, and tell you our stories as I hear them so that I can draw die helm over my eyes. Sometimes, some-times, I will speak to you in my own language first and then I will translate for you into English as I understand it. Sometimes, some-times, I will speak to you in English only (turn to **This pathway between my home (language) and yours**). But in walking

together through the stories of my people, through my stories, I will begin to understand myself as a Queer Afrikaner womxn better through understanding where I come from. To speak to my ghosts, I must read, see, listen to, and tell the stories of my people. (Turn to **The Humming Soil of Boontjieskraal** and **The Heaped Bones of August** for some of these stories I retell.) (Turn to **Nou weet ek net jy sal my steeds gevange hou** for an exploration of how I find a language for these stories.)

E.

The Heaped Bones of August (or a wilting whisper of Antjie Somers)

In these twilight days, my father no longer tells our stories. He left them in the mountains when he hooked his green jacket onto a tree and left his boots in the corridor untouched. And to the doorframe the old man hammered a penny. "Cover the mirrors with sheets" he said. Seven years of scars carried in its cracks. "The old woman's quilted face is looking through."

It is year eight now and the mirror has not mended. And the old woman has been sitting in the sun, bones draped in skin kept in the folds of oily newspapers. In the garden, bodies carve bone from the earth and accumulate the silence for the mice to chew on. In this damp room where I have been sitting, my skin folds into ochre smoke of grandmother's coal stove. With weighted hands and tongues thrumming, the air swells with an urgent whisper:

The Cape gallows stand empty today but for a fisherman, a hangman and a thief, their innocence or guilt undeclared, each wearing a striped dress and each head covered with a red doek.

Skin, tough and thickened, the fisherman shimmered in the sunlight sinking into the sea. With his basket overflowing with fish, the fisherman's feet knew the way to his hut in the veld, limbs aching for the hook where he could hang the yellowed canvas day crusted with salt and flay his scales and trousers for her striped blue dress. Her weary bones heaped up the night hidden far away from the whispers of townspeople. But they grew restless, eyes clinging to the fisherman. Their choirs littered the road and murmured to the wind as he passed. And today, his were not the only feet on the road to his hut. Trailing behind him was a gathering of ten shoed feet.

"Andries!" a man shouted to the fisherman.

"Andries Somers!" he shouted again, his mouth curling into a smirk.

Andries stopped, set down his basket and rod, and peered over his shoulder at the feet that were gaining on him. It was the dry feet of the ones who whistled at the woman on their way to work, the young fishermen who drank beer on the rocks, boats docked at ten, baskets

carrying only five fish. The young men who did not listen to the ocean and the fish who always follow the rain.

The feet had surrounded Andries, their eyes engulfed in flames as they tightened their circle. The leader of the pack stepped forward, his face inches away from Andries, breath hot and damp, he spat at Andries' feet before shoving him into one of the other men. Backs collided with chests, collided with fists but Andries remained firm and sure footed. He tried to reason with them but a fist sank into his stomach before he could finish and he staggered. And feet lifted dust and battered his limbs but Andries had been strengthened by years of work and they were no match for his strength. Defeated, the young men ran away. All but one, who lay on the ground, his head on a rock, not moving, not breathing. A puddle of blood was darkening the soil and matted the young man's hair. Andries shook him and poured water on his face but his body remained limp. For this, the townspeople would never forgive him. He cupped the young man's wilting head in his hands but his grief was whipped into the wind with no ears to mourn the loss and leaving the young man's body in the road, he ran to where he could find her. His feet carried him to the veld, to his hut where the striped dress waited. When the sun set, he tied his long hair into a bun, wrapped a red doek around his head and beard, and put on her dress. "Antjie Somers" she whispered to her reflection in the mirror. This way, they wouldn't recognise her, she could slip past their glances unnoticed and disappear into the night.

For days, she trudged deeper and deeper into the yellowed grass of the midlands until she found a town where she could be a stranger again. She replaced her dress with scales and changed back into Andries to find a job on the farm. Here, he was invisible again, eyes were all about but turned away from him disinterested in this unfamiliar face. He spent his evenings alone and never spoke to the other farmworkers. From morning till night, he tilled the soil, picked fruit from the apple trees and went to the farmer with baskets overflowing. After a few months, Andries was promoted to foreman, but the other farmworkers grew suspicious of this peculiar man who lived so within himself. They gossiped loudly "Andries has no wife and no women ever visit him" "Andries is always alone in that hut of his talking to mirrors" "Whose striped dress hangs on his washing line?" but he ignored them and drew deeper within himself. The gossiping grew louder and within a week, the whole farm was talking. "Antjie Somers, Antjie Somers" they would scoff. Whispering rang ceaselessly in his ears and soon he could no longer stand it. A sweltering fear crept under his skin that, just like the townspeople, the farmworkers would grow restless and start a fight. So, one night when darkness swelled over the farm and the dreamhour settled with the dust, he tied his long hair into a bun, put on the

striped dress, wrapped his head and beard in the red doek and disappeared into the night. Andries Somers was never seen again. But the young fishermen placed his skull at the gates of the town as a warning to thieves, and the townspeople still whisper: “Beware, Antjie Somers will catch you!”

The Cape gallows stand empty today but for a hangman and a thief; their innocence or guilt undeclared, each wearing a striped dress and each head covered with a red doek.

The end of Tuin Street is dark. Willows weep leaves onto the hangman’s house where no one ever visits. No one but the old woman who sits on the porch smoking a pipe and the young men who crawl from the cracks of this town. Says the whisper.

He hanged four today, the third of whom took his own life. The whisper says there was a fifth but that he carried this one home in a bag, still crying, a young boy who stole from Lord Charles’ wife.

Hair tied up in a red doek, the old woman hides her pipe in her bun and drinks tea from the shell of a tortoise. Her chin is stubbled with hair and for a scarf, she wraps her neck in the skin of a painted wolf. Wind whistles through the hollows of her chest and escapes again in cold screams of little voices. Says the whisper.

The whisper says the young men stay at the hangman’s house for eight strokes of darkness and leave when the cannon fires. They return with bruises around their necks and wrists, the young men who live in the cramped cracks of the town.

The hangman wears a striped dress at night, his head wrapped in a red doek. The whisper says he has hooves for feet and a hare’s lip and never looks in the mirror. For a scarf, he wraps his neck in the skin of a painted. “Andries Somers he is called and he does not speak” says the whisper.

A young man has been staying with the hangman for a month now. And the hangman has left the gallows empty. He reads to the young man from a book of poetry written in dust. Says the whisper.

The old woman wears a striped dress and carries a basket of bones and scorpions. She has hooves for feet and a hare’s lip and never looks in the mirror. “Antjie Somers she is called and she does not speak.” Says the whisper.

"On this the tenth of August seventeen-nineteen, the year of our Lord, it is decreed that no man shall torture or hang another", Lord Charles announced.

And the whisper says Andries no longer reads from the book of poetry, the young man was seen crawling to the cracks again and Andries hanged himself from a tree.

But Antjie still walks in Tuin Street weeping for her lost love.

They tried to lay the ghost but she leapt away from them and took her house to the foothills of Table Mountain. In the day, a mist lingers on the gallows that the sun cannot pierce. And at the first stroke of darkness she begs young men for a lift. "Beware" the whisper warns, "Antjie Somers will catch you"

The Cape gallows stand empty today but for a thief, his innocence or guilt undeclared, wearing a striped dress and head covered with a red doek.

I remember the mist that settled that August. It came from the murky mountain in the east. I delved in the caves of that mountain for this memory, the memory of the old woman on the road.

There was a house with a kitchen and a table, six chairs and six cups for tea but only one man, called Andries Somers, waiting with the dust. I remember the walls spilling laughter and five others living with him in love and loss but no one remembers why they turned to stone.

And I'm calling for him across the yellow grass but he hides his face in his red doek and his body in the striped dress, hides from all the people and the mirrors in his house have been covered with soot since that dark night in August. And I'm calling for him across the boats docked in the bay but they disappear in the palm of my hands.

And I'm calling for him across the drops of tea in my cup, and the old woman comes down from the mountains, the one they call a thief. With her she carries a basket and a palmful of stories that she wrote with her bones. She hides her face in a red doek and a scarf. It has whiskers and a snout resting on her breast. And it pleased the beggar Prophet with his holy hands to take her life in that intended hour in the dust. They left her body there in the road and knew no one would ask after a lonely thief. That night in August, feigning illness and asking for some bread, she'd stopped the carriage of a doctor and a farmhand. The farmhand did not trust this stranger with eyes so hollow and bereft and when the moonlight caught her face, he noticed that her chin was stubbled with a beard. So, when the carriage stopped for the doctor

to open the farm gate, the farmhand dropped his gloves and asked the old woman to pick them up. As she looked away, he grabbed the doctor's pistol and shot her in the base of her skull.

It's been raining on the mountains and on the roads between this place and on the stone, and I remember the faces of the people who knew of Andries. Now they only whisper: "Beware of Antjie Somers, the old woman made of dust."

The Cape gallows stand empty today. Your innocence or guilt undeclared, body clothed in a striped dress, head wrapped in a red doek. And your name is whispered in lost streams that run past the roads where you walk, a mirage chafed from the hot breath of the sun. And when I traced your foot steps from Tuin Street to the foothills of Table Mountain, I could hear you laughing and sometimes I heard you cry, there where you dwell in depths beneath the earth, searching.

1. Dagboek van 'n swerwer. [40] Journal of a Sojourner: A wilting whisper of Antjie Somers

The story of Antjie Somers haunts the tongues of many Afrikaans people and the whisper changes from family to family, each narrating Antjie in a different way. Just as each narrative that speaks of them takes on a different shape depending on the narrator, so s/he takes on a different shape depending on who speaks of them. Some whispers say that s/he has wings on their feet, springs in their heels and can become invisible (Grobbelaar, Hudson & Van der Merwe, 1977:64). Some say s/he has eyes like a lizard or gecko, and/or if s/he sees you first, you turn into stone. Some say if you see them first, s/he turns into stone. Some say that s/he can make themselves invisible and like a thought, s/he can move from one place to another in an instant. S/he is also said to be able to haunt people and do magic. Some say s/he got their name because s/he only appears in summer, and when s/he appears in winter, s/he goes by Antjie Winters. In the past, some even used their name as an epithet to ridicule womxn who wear trousers or torn clothing (Grobbelaar, Hudson & Van der Merwe, 1977:64). But every tongue tells of a witch-like figure and a (sometimes black, sometimes coloured, sometimes white) man duping travellers into believing he is a vulnerable womxn in order to rob and/or murder them. A person who plunders houses and steals children. No one remembers when or where the whisper started, where or when the whisper said s/he steals children. And what of the hardworking fisherman, the hangman, the old womxn on the porch, the man living alone

[40] This title is also the title of a Koos du Plessis' poem that appears in *Erfdeel.*

with the dust, the old womxn on the road? No one knows or can say. Few ask why the spectre of Antjie lingers like fog, or why Andries was driven to the outskirts of society and folded into himself. What does it mean that a queer figure in this Afrikaans folktale is likened to an animal and is said to have animal features? What does it mean that a man who dresses in womxn's clothes, or a transgender womxn, is remembered as a shapeshifting witch, a paedophile, a monstrous figure of the darkness? What does it mean that in most retellings of Antjie's story, s/he is hunted and killed because of their Queerness/witchcraft/animality? Told as a warning and a threat to naughty children, the whispers deform them and relegate them to the realms of fantasy, rumour, and ghosts. But s/he is calling to me, from within me, from the hidden place and their hand is outstretched; s/he haunts me, inhabits me, stays with me; their story "tells us not only what might have happened, but also what is happening at an unspecified time and place" (Minh-ha, 1989:133).

And I'm calling for them across the yellow grass but s/he hides their face in their red doek *and their body in the striped dress, hides from all the people and the mirrors in this house have been covered with soot since that dark night in August. And I'm calling for them across the boats docked in the bay but they disappear in the palm of my hands. And I'm calling for them across the drops of tea in my cup, and the old wo/mxn comes down from the mountains, the one they call a thief. With them s/he carries a basket and a palmful of stories that s/he wrote with their bones. S/he hides their face in a red* doek *and a scarf. It has whiskers and a snout resting on their breast.*

Read as queer figure, the spectre of Antjie Somers reiterates how (some) queer figures are "marginalized and disavowed in order to establish and uphold a particular norm" (del Pilar Blanco & Pereen, 2013:330). The norm deforms the queer figure as freakish and grotesque to ensure that the queer figure remains abject and feared but Antjie refuses such master narratives. Their ambiguity as both past and present, absent and present, both man and womxn, living and not, perhaps black, perhaps coloured, perhaps white, elides categorical mastery. As a ghost, s/he refuses to be laid to rest and the reoccurring and ever-changing nature of their story in so many Afrikaans families, their refusal to disappear, reveals that queer subjects "can never be completely erased but insist on reappearing to trouble the norm" (del Pilar Blanco & Pereen, 2013:330). While told, written and therefore (re)conjured, a ghost emerging both from within and without many Afrikaans families, s/he does not belong to those whom s/he haunts. Instead s/he "figure[s] the impossibility of mastering, through knowledge or action, the past or the present") and "figure[s] the necessity of grasping certain implications of the past for the present

only as traces or effects" (Freccero, 2013: 342). Antjie "is not traceable to an origin nor to a founding event, [s/he] does not have an objective or "comprehensive" history, yet [s/he] operates as a force…" (Brown, 2001:149-150) and the unclear, ambiguous nature of their origin, their story, their past, much like their equivocal gender, sexuality, and race points to the critique that is inherent in the mere existence of queer (spectral) subjectivities, a critique of "originary purity, unmixedness, and simplicity" (Freccero, 2013:342). As Wendy Brown (2001:149) writes, "the spectre begins by coming back, by repeating itself, by recurring in the present".

It's been raining on the mountains and on the roads between this place and on the stone, and I remember the meek faces of the people who knew of Andries. Now they only whisper: "Beware of Antjie Somers, the old womxn made of dust."

What does their story then point to in the present? Their voice "'re-bite[s]' [*re-mordent*] the place from which [s/he was] excluded; [s/he] continue[s] to speak in the text/tomb that erudition erects in their place'" (De Certeau, 1986:8) but what is s/he saying? As the "[(b)orderline] between then and now wavers, wobbles, and does not hold still" (Freccero, 2013: 337), the spectre of Antjie is demanding something from the present, but what is it that s/he is demanding?

And when I traced your foot steps from Tuin Street to the foothills of Table Mountain, I could hear you laughing and sometimes I heard you cry, there where you dwell in depths beneath the earth, searching.

Antjie's story is theirs "but it is also, no doubt, older than [them]. Younger than [them], older than the humanized. Unmeasurable, uncontainable, so immense that it exceeds all attempts at humanizing" (Minh-ha, 1989:123). Refusing to be entombed, Antjie's story is not something of a bygone past. Rather, achronological temporalities conflate, and in an indeterminate move, "the touch infinitely attentive of a fairy's wand, a woman's voice, or a woman's hand, which goes to meet things in the dark" (Minh-ha, 1989:132), reads the anachronisms, inconsistencies and narrative excesses of Antjie's story as the narrative of many queer humxns, such as humxns that are Queer in their gender, Queer in their sexuality, or queer in their beliefs (in this case specifically humxns who engage with and/or are accused of witchcraft), a response that can thus "pass them on without deafening, without extinguishing in the process" (Minh-ha, 1989:132).

2. Hunting: figures of witches and Queers

Hunting: chasing wild animals, especially foxes or birds, and try to kill or capture them, for food or sport (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2018).

We ask, was he born out of homosexuality? We need continuity in our race, and that comes from the woman, and no to homosexuality. John and John, no; Maria and Maria, no. They are worse than dogs and pigs. I keep pigs and the male pig knows the female one. – Former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe (quoted in "Robert Mugabe's most famous quotes", 2017)

They are misquoting me. I said I didn't hate people who engage in homosexual behaviour… I simply said by legalizing it you are opening the door to many other things such as bestiality, child molestation, and abortion. See… these things are all interconnected. Where are the limits? Today we legalize gay marriage in New York… next who knows what will be legalized? Laws exist for a reason. – Former Governor of Alaska, U.S.A Sarah Palin on Fox News, 2011 (quoted in Lewis, 2018)

When I was growing up, unqingili (a gay person) would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out. - Former South African President Jacob Zuma, Heritage Day Celebrations, 2006 (quoted in "Maimane, Zuma and other 'anti-gay' statements in SA politics", 2015)

Sayali Kapese and her brother were segregated at school and branded witches and ghosts by locals frightened by their appearance. The condition they suffer from – Lamellar Ichthyosis - means that they shed their skin every 3 days, and this has led locals to believe that they are witches (Foxcroft, 2017:10).

Western and contemporary urban imaginaries think of witch-hunts, like the hunting of Antjie Somers, as dusty relics of a long-gone past and often confine witchcraft and the persecution of people who practice witchcraft to the realm of fantasy relegating them to darkness. In many countries across the globe thousands of people, especially womxn and children, are still hunted and killed for being suspected of practicing witchcraft[*1] and are subjected to arbitrary violence perpetrated mainly by men and the youth (Roi, 2014). Likewise, Queer humxns continue to be

isolated, marginalised, and violated in the same ways as Antjie. Thus, it seems that the story of Antjie Somers is not just a story repeated and retold by Afrikaans people, but a story lived by many (queer) figures in society today. These queer figures are "undecidably [sic] inside and outside the body (like the skin of milk), dead and alive (like the corpse), autonomous and engulfing (like infection and pollution). [They are] what disturbs identity, system and order, disrupting the social boundaries demanded by the symbolic" (Grozs, 1990:90). And perhaps, it is for this reason that the treatment of Queer people and those (queer figures) suspected and/or accused of witchcraft in contemporary society continue to be strikingly similar. There are intersections between these two (often intermingled and intertwined) lives that stretch beyond the experiences of violence that we share. These intersections are particularly evident in the story of Antjie Somers who is both Queer and a witch. So establishing and exploring (some of) these intersections could be a productive path towards understanding what Antjie Somers and their story represent and what s/he and their story still demand from the present. Come with me as I follow Antjie along the many roads s/he walks, listening to their language.

***1 Witchcraft**

Witchcraft, as Thomas Aneurin Smith, Amber Murrey and Hayley Leck (2017:142) write, "might be taken to mean those encounters, moments, thoughts, beings, and materials that cannot be fully explained or unpacked but that, by definition of being 'magical', are necessarily partially obscured". Witchcraft has also been "understood as notably ambiguous, fluid, and mobile… [and] has been described as an ontology that frames and informs being in the world: perceptions of time, place, embodiment, and in/visibility. Witchcraft has also been taken to be an overarching knowledge through which people interpret power, misfortune, wealth, and phenomenological reality. With distinctions and variations in practice and language, witchcraft has sometimes been understood historically and ethnographically as partially reflective of, or arising out of, violent experiences and provides ways to understand and interpret varying encounters with violence, death, misfortune, and illness" (Smith et al., 2017:142).

2.1. A present absence that overturns, the overturned absent presence.

It is dark again, the dreamhour is settling with the dust, and somewhere, hidden far away from the whispers of townspeople, I hear Antjie's weary bones heap up the night. The townspeople are restless, eyes clinging to Antjie and their choirs litter the road as we pass them. They are whispering about us and though their voices are faint I can hear them murmur to the wind.

There are many similarities that can be drawn between the manner in which witches and Queer people are perceived. Witches are seen by witch-hunters and their communities as "normal people who have, consciously or unconsciously, been transformed into transgressive beings that overturn most physical and moral boundaries" and "witchcraft indicates a presence that overturns the individual person and makes him or her into something else, an ambiguous being"

Elrine: At home, my parents are divorced, with my father it (Queerness) is something that he just kind of accepted. There was never a big coming out story. It was just like one of those things like "oh you are dating this girl" and it was fine and it was accepted. So we talk about sexuality but I was never questioned about it. Whereas with my mother, who is of a higher education than my father, who just finished matric and that was it, whereas my mother is professor, she kind of questions why. Like is it because of the circles I move in, is it because of past of abuse and, and, and. She's still holding out for a man, marriage and

(Roi, 2014:326). For instance, Afrikaans people believe that Antjie's ability to shapeshift, their animal-like features, and their ability to move from one place to another in an instant can be attributed to supernatural forces that transformed them into this ambiguous being. Antjie and other witches' ambiguity as humxn and animal, within and without time and space, and their so-called immorality make them strange and unknowable. People cannot recognise or read them through normative understanding and thus they become unnameable, unspeakable, unsayable, unliveable, ungrievable . They must be named, specified, marked and categorised in 'books of knowledge' to be within reach. Yet theirs is often not a language of the pen but of the (cut off) tongue, of stories that are transmitted orally, of the (accumulating, excessive, abject) body. They speak from the body, through the body, with the body. But to use the language of the body, from which we have become so distant, is to allow 'reason' to come and go, and to become other than (hu)man (see **(Pre)ambling**). Reya writes about the Kuma of the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea:

> [The] Kuma contrast 'witches' (*agamp kum*) with 'real people' (*agamp wei*). No one is born with a *kum* inside him, but anyone may discover at any age that one has entered his body by jumping from that of a host who has proved unsatisfactory or from a convicted witch at the moment of death. Thus the witch is seen as a humanoid, once fully human, creature, who has lost cortical control and been taken over by a subhuman drive located in his abdomen (quoted in Roi, 2014: 326).

Similar to this narrative about witches is a commonly held belief about Queer humxns which says that we are 'deviant' in our sexuality and/or gender as a result of a disease, and that our deviance entered our bodies through that disease (see De Block & Adriaens, 2013). Some also believe that our 'deviance' is due to mental illness and/or as a result of a curse (see Tucker, 2009). Thus, much like witches' strange abilities are attributed to external (unknowable) forces, Queer humxns' deviance is often attributed to external forces too. And like witches, Queer humxns are often subsequently subjected to physical abuse as a means to 'correct' our deviance, to bring us back on to the path that is straight and narrow. Both witches and Queer humxns are often beaten, tamed, burned, domesticated into submission to (hetero)normativity, and Queer humxns are often even 'correctively' raped. Once we 'come out', we are ousted; we

become unknowable, unspeakable, unsayable. We are told that we were not born this way and that it is just a phase; we are treated as sub-humxn. We slip away from the stigmatising tongue and refuse to be held in its grip. This means that we become murky, blurry, incontrollable, sites of fear. And so we must be subjected to forms of control: named, specified, marked and categorised in ways that make us controllable and within reach, even as we are relegated as pariahs to the margins. We are absent. We are present. We *are* and yet we *cannot be*. Deviance is often marked as criminal, perverted and/or evil and "the abject ambiguity of [someone] who defies binaries and troubles notions… prompts medical and juridical discourses to deploy the gothic notion of monstrosity as a justification for their intrusion" (Westengard, 2012:30-31). In many countries, queer humxns, like witches and Queer people, can be criminally charged and punished by the state. Many countries no longer criminalise Queer humxns and in some countries, such as South Africa, Queer humxns have constitutional protection. Yet, even in these countries, the stigmas surrounding Queer people continue to place us in grave danger. As is from Antjie, marked as a thief who steals children, Queer people are often condemned as perverted, paedophilic, monstrous and sinful. Similarly, many countries no longer criminalise witchcraft, yet witches are still seen as evil and dangerous and witch-hunts remain widespread.

"So baie, baie keer het ek jou vreemde naam vergeefs vir kroegman, klerk en predikant gespel en daar was so baie leë winternagte saam met mense wat nie weet waarheen nie, maar vertel. Daar was so baie ligte om die pad te wys en soveel vaag-bekende beelde in die mis; ek het so dikwels en so ver alleen gereis om telkens net te vind dat jy weer elders is" [So many, many times, I spelt your strange name to barmen, clerks and ministers in vain and there were so many hollow winter nights with people who do not know where, but still tell. There were so many lights to guide the way and so many vaguely familiar images in the mist; I have travelled alone so often and so far only to discover that you are elsewhere again.] (Du Plessis 2010: 48, my translation).

2.2. There is a crack, a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.[41]

The Cape gallows stand empty today. Your innocence or guilt undeclared, body clothed in a striped dress, head wrapped in a red doek. *And your name is whispered in lost streams that run past the roads where you walk, a mirage chafed from the hot breath of the sun. And when I traced your foot steps from Tuin Street to the foothills of Table Mountain, I could hear you laughing and sometimes I heard you cry, there where you dwell in depths beneath the earth, searching.*

[41] This title is a lyric from Leonard Cohen's (1992) song *Anthem.*

The fear that many communities have of witches is based on their "belonging to ontologies based on the possibility of, and openness towards, continuation between life forms" and the ability of sacrifice practiced by witches to "merge life and death… brings aspects of the spirit world in contact with the world of the living… replaces human life with animal life and… uses this shift of realms for the benefit of transforming identities" (Roi, 2014: 324). Evidently witches queer(y) categories, reveal their blurriness, and show how they bleed and continue into one another making it impossible to tell where one stops and the other starts. Indeed, witchcraft, as Roi notes, is often seen "as forces bursting out, invading, merging and overtaking the multiple relations and categories of social life" (2014:323). An example of this which is particularly relevant here is that Antjie Somers is said to have animal like features, and/or the ability to shapeshift into animals. Antjie is thus not just humxn, s/he is more than humxn, s/he bursts out of the category of humxn, s/he merges humxn and animal for s/he is both an animal and a humxn, and also neither humxn nor animal. Furthermore, Antjie has no singular appearance that runs consistently throughout stories about them. Rather, s/he appears in different shapes, shades, identities and faces in each different retelling. Their narrative therefore takes an ever-changing, shapeshifting from which embodies Antjie's own morphing and the fluid nature of Antjie's appearance, and therefore moves with Antjie. As I have noted before, Antjie is also said to be able to move from place to place in an instant, an ambiguity which is also taken up by the manner in which the story is passed on. Throughout the years, Antjie has been appearing and continues to appear (through their story and haunting) in various Afrikaans households and even forms a central part of the Afrikaans imagination. S/he enters, invades, claims the homes of Afrikaans people despite being unwelcome, and actively refused. S/he and their story appear out of nowhere overtaking the categories we take for granted. None of the narratives is consistent about when s/he was (is) alive, what their origins are, or what the origin of their story is. This narrative excess, this excessive narrative, which defies unifying impulses, thus transgresses time and space and transgresses the constructed separation between reality as we know it and the world of the magical. Their story thus reminds us that "the past and the present are neither discrete nor sequential" (Freccero, 2013:337).

Antjie is 'they' because s/he is many things and s/he is multiple. In her multiplicity, s/he is not bound to linear notions of time and space, past and present, then and now, here, there or elsewhere. And despite people attempting to kill them in all the various retellings of their story, Antjie remains alive and absent while present, present while absent (see **Note on queerness and the archive**). Just as s/he is said to be able to haunt people, their story haunts people. Thus,

Antjie and other so-called witches embody questions about the validity and existence of the binaries upheld by dominant power structures; such as life and death, humxn and animal, the spirit world and the world of the living. They therefore threaten to dis/rupt(ure) the thinly constructed membrane between these concepts, revealing itsinherent permeability. Notably, the term 'hag', another word often used for a witch, is related to the Old English word, *haga*, which means 'hedge'. "Old Norse had *tunriða* and Old High German *zunritha*, [which] both literally [mean] 'hedge-rider' [and was] used [for] witches and ghosts" (Harper, 2018). As a 'hedge-rider', the witch exists on the hedge that is constructed by man to separate reality into two distinct spheres, the natural and the supernatural.[42] Thus, witches occupy the in-between ground, the interstice, between categories. For "in-between grounds always exist, and cracks and interstices are like gaps of fresh air that keep on being suppressed because they tend to render more visible the failures operating in every system" (Minh-ha, 1989:41) (turn to **Met die helm gebore** where we meet figures that show us toward the productive possibility of this interstice).

***2 Queer witch**

I wonder if Antjie is seen as witch precisely because of their (Queer) ambiguity. Indeed, through a heteronormative lens, being trans- (across, above) the gender one is assigned at birth is a sort of shapeshifting from one's so-called 'natural' gender to another. Through that understanding, Antjie's ambiguity, fluidity and queerness can therefore only be interpreted as the result of *super*natural and magical abilities.

But Antjie does not only queer the abovementioned binary logics, since they are also Queer in both their gender and sexuality. Some interpret Antjie as a drag queen, others interpret them as a gay man and drag queen, some interpret them as a Queer womxn, some interpret them as intersex, others interpret them as gender non-binary, some interpret them as bigender, and others interpret them as transgender. S/he is all of these and none of these because s/he eludes the grip of classification. S/he is 'they' because s/he is not bound to a singular gender. And their ambiguous and/or ever-changing gender and sexuality is inseparable from their identity as a witch[*2]. This simultaneity, this curious slippage and fluidity thus points to another manner in which witches and Queer humxns are similar. Queer, when used as an umbrella term to refer to the LGBTQIAP+ community, rejects the hetero-homosexual binary distinction and it thus makes room for identities that deviate from the norm but are not usually recognised in dominant discourses regarding the LGBTQIAP+ community. Queer, used in this way, is a more inclusive term than LGBTQIAP+ and seeks to challenge the regulatory powers of heteronormativity, and

[42] See Trinh T. Minh-ha's (2016) *Boundary Event* in her *Elsewhere, within here* for more on the constructed separation between the natural and the supernatural.

redefine sexuality and gender as transitional and non-essential and in so doing, undo the bounds that have been created in categorising sexual and gender identities. Thus, being Queer transgresses dominant categories of gender and sexuality. And in the same way, the witch, as Roi (2014:328, my emphasis) notes, "has no stable identity, [s/he] is transgressing time and space, [s/he] is anyone and everyone, that is, [s/he] is placed beyond the *bounded reachable identity* of the person" (see ***5 Spilling into, Spilling out**). It is important to note that while I do use Queer to refer to sexual and gendered orientations that deviate from the norm, I am also interested, as I have stated elsewhere, in how queerness can signify deviance from the norm, designating those who refuse to, who cannot, or simply do not reproduce the social as is. My thinking coincides with Michael Warner (1993:xxvi) who argues that "'queer' represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest - representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal" (turn to **Notes on queerness and the archive** for a clarification of how I use the term queer). Since witchcraft, like Antjie (and their queer story), like Queerness, is "notoriously hybrid and mobile… constantly traveling and being borrowed, mixed, and innovated" (Smith et al., 2017:142), witches can be seen as queer figures. Indeed, both Queer people and witches disrupt and threaten to expose the false logic of binary thinking.

This is no simple threat because this queer(y)ing threatens the power structures that these binaries uphold. Indeed, witches and witchcraft "represent an increment to the normal social circumstances" (Roi, 2014:326). Similarly, being Queer is threatening to heteronormativity and "notions of culture as static" (Lynch & Sanger, 2016: 43). And it is this threat that witches and Queer people pose which often motivates hate crimes against these queer figures. The threat that drives this violence is the threat of destabilizing control, destabilizing normativity, and ultimately a threat to the dominance of patriarchy. Queer people 'threaten' reproductive futurism (turn to **Ek soek vergeefs na lank vermiste mense, wat om my is maar onbereikbaar ver** where you may meet other figures that disrupt reproductive futurism in a different way). Lesbian womxn, for instance, do not exist as useful to men since they will not reproduce to continue any man's lineage and sexually they do not exist to give pleasure to men. Similarly, with regards to witch-hunts overwhelmingly targeting womxn, Lee (2016:402) notes

> a number of reasons for gender disparity and how it is linked to accuse women as witches: beliefs related to women's reproductive powers, women are considered the weaker sex… [T]he talk and tradition surrounding the accusation of women as witches was closely intertwined to men's thirsts to expand supremacy and prominence, deducted from ideals of masculinity.

Indeed, once womxn are no longer useful to men in some form they may be labelled 'witch' to justify exterminating and discarding of them[*3]. Both witches and queer humxns "rarely lead a regular lifestyle like other community members because of the physical, economic, social and psychological violence they experience. In addition, their lives and that of their immediate family members are ruthlessly upset and regularly they are absolutely ruined" (Lee, 2016:407). These acts of violence become acts that the perpetrator believes will destroy queerness and witchcraft and thus exterminate it from the community. "The beating is also justified not just as an attack for correcting a wayward son or nephew, but also a cure for removing an evil force that has obstructed and captured his true identity" and "the violence is not directed towards the individual self, but rather towards a relational field wherein one aspect of a person has to be separated from another" (Roi, 2014:332). The perpetrators thus see their acts as "corrective". For instance, in many such gruesome acts against lesbian womxn, perpetrators tell their victims that they will "show her she wasn't a man like them" (Kgotso Mokwena quoted in Mdluli, 2017). See also, for instance, an article in *The Daily Telegraph* that reports a case of a fifteen year old white Afrikaans boy who died after being starved, beaten, and chained to his bed at a camp aimed at "making men out of boys", a euphemism for what the camp actually is: a gay conversion camp. The youth was sent to the camp by his parents so that he could become "a better man". The camp is run by Alex de Koker, a man with a history that is deeply intertwined with the AWB and other white supremacist groups such as Eugene Terreblance's Iron Guard. Even further disturbing is that the perpetrators of such hate crimes against Queer humxns and witches are also often those closest to them: relatives or friends (see Morrissey, 2013; Van Heerden, 2017; Hopkinson, Keatley, Glaeser, Erickson-Schroth, Fattal & Sullivan, 2017;

***3 Discarded**

This (en)gendered violence is nothing new. With its roots sprouting long before the Salem witch trials, dominant discourse entangled with Westernised Christian thought paints the womxn as evil. Literature and popular culture is littered, so to speak, with images of Queens disguised as old womxn poisoning or cursing young womxn for fear of their power being taken away, the vagina dentata that seeks to devour men, Lady Macbeths, womxn in attics, each depicted as embittered, senile, mad, grotesque, monstrous, jealous and evil, each skirting the edges of their communities as outsiders. These mangled representations make such womxn capable of and easily responsible for the 'evil' deeds and practices communities imagine(d) witches committed. It is a clever trick of patriarchy to figure such womxn as threats since this makes these womxn a threat to the whole community and not only to patriarchy. Not only does it 'unite' the community against 'a common enemy', it also manages to divide womxn and pit us against one another. Indeed, division is the trump card of the powerful and history teems with segregation.

Maria: Even my dad when I came out, I never tell people this because it paints him in a bad light, he said it's because of all my white friends that I'm gay and that doesn't make any sense to me. Just because all my Queer friends are white doesn't mean it's linked. He kept saying "no one else in the family has this, you're the only one, and it's because you have white friends" my sister has white friends and she's straight

Juárez-Chávez, Cooney, Hidalgo, Sánchez, & Poteat, 2018; Roi, 2014). Roi (2014:326) explains that in the case of witches, "the paranoia of everyday life is that one's close relations turn out to be potentially lethal" to one's (normative) understanding of the world. Members of the communities of both Queer humxns and witches view them as a stain on the reputation of the community because they reflect and make visible the community's inability to uphold certain norms. Acts of violence against them are seen as a purification of both the community and of the victim. "For outsiders it may look like punishment or vengeance, but for relatives of the accused it is about separating the good from the evil so as to restore moral integrity and balance in the person" (Roi, 2014:333). This is much like 'corrective' rape is seen as 'curing' the rape victim of their deviant sexuality and 'restoring' them to the non-deviant state of heterosexuality (Koraan & Geduld, 2015).

The violence as purification of the community becomes clearer when considering that many of these acts happen surrounded by spectators and are often perpetrated by groups.[43] Many hate crimes against Queer people happen in the form of gang rape and/or group attacks. An article in *The Daily Sun* reports a case where a black lesbian womxn was raped while the rapist's friends were watching. When asked why they did not intervene, one witness replied that he did so out of fear for his life, yet he went to bed immediately after the attack. The other witness stated that he was too drunk to intervene (see Mdluli, 2017)[*4]. *PinkNews* also reports a case in Mooinooi, South Africa where a young white Afrikaans lesbian couple were raped, murdered and set alight by a group of two womxn and six men, one of whom was their close friend (see Jackman, 2018). In another instance, an article in the *Saturday Star* reports a case where two white men were violently attacked in Melville by a group of white Afrikaans students from the University of Johannesburg who suspected that the two men were gay (see Serumula, 2014). *News24* reports an incident of a transgender womxn who was attacked by three men outside a University of the Western Cape student residence (see Gay-bashing incident at top Cape varsity, 2012). Crowds, including a security guard, gathered to watch the violent attack but did

***4 Spectators**

The onlookers and perpetrators of hate crimes against these queer figures are not the only spectators. Narratives of black lesbian womxn's rape and murder are often the only narratives that exist in the media about black lesbians. Spectators pervade the lives of Queer people and from the comfort of heteronormativity, many heterosexual people fetishize Queer people, queer sex, and appropriate queer aesthetic and culture.

[43] I am thinking of Shirley Jackon's *The Lottery* and the sacrifice of a member of the community to ensure a fruitful crop. Queer people and witches become offerings to ensure that normativity is upheld.

nothing to intervene. These cases are just a few of the many cases of gruesome attacks on Queer people by groups of people. Similarly, suspected witches are

> severely beaten… mostly by gangs of young men, but in the presence of spectators and the committee of chiefs... Typically… suspicion would have its basis in motifs such as jealousy or anger or just deviant social behaviour such as restlessness or seeing the wrong kind of people (Roi, 2014:329).

Again, these descriptions of violence are similar to Antjie Somers' experience. In many retellings of their story, Antjie is persecuted by groups of men within the communities in which s/he lives. These attacks against Antjie are often catalysed by the jealousy of community members and/or (spurred on) by rumours and gossip about Antjie's ambiguity, Antjie's companions, Antjie's deviance, and Antjie's isolation from the community. For instance, one retelling of Antjie's story that I remember and included in my own retelling shows the community's jealousy regarding Antjie's (Andries') fruitful yield as a fisherman and farmworker. My retelling also includes the community's framing of Antjie as a thief, the gossip and rumours about Antjie, and the manner in which Antjie (Andries) isolated themselves because of ostracism. Roi (2014:328) notes that the witch's deviance "calls for speculation, rumours and searches" by the community because, to the community, this deviance, this ambiguity, this in-between signals "a bursting out of energies that are normally hidden from view" and thus suggests "a dangerous opening between realms" (Roi, 2014:330) of the known and the unknown, the knowable and the unknowable. This rupture in the membrane that separates these worlds results in a moment of "uncertainty, of failure [to uphold this separation] and moral scrutiny" (Roi, 2014:327). What becomes clear is that Antjie and other queer figures expose and point to their community's fear of the queerness and ambiguity that may exist within, lurking just below the surface, carefully and purposefully hidden from view. When these queer figures are no longer hidden, or they no longer hide their queerness, it signals that "what was unspoken and incomprehensible can now suddenly explode into a multitude of meaning and signification" (Roi, 2014:331). These queer figures are therefore not a threat in of ourselves but rather it is what we represent that poses a threat. We represent a crack, a fissure,

an aporia in the logics of the patriarchal order and the membrane it has constructed in-between the world as we know it and the world of the magical, unfamiliar, queer. We represent the *possibility* that the logics of patriarchal order are in fact false. What we also represent is the possibility of the existence of things that are unknown and unknowable to patriarchy and therefore exist *beyond* the reach of patriarchy's controlling hand. Indeed, queerness cannot be commanded, directed, or controlled by (the binary logics of) patriarchy for it is unbounded and unboundable. Therefore, patriarchy is entirely uncertain about the contours and landscapes of queerness and the existence of queer figures points to a moment in which the unknown is spilling into known, the unknowable is spilling into the knowable, and what was once familiar becomes entirely unfamiliar[*5].

The community in which this threat arises thus has to "locate that opening in the moral membrane that separates the world of social relations and the world of forces that lies beyond them… and remove that potentiality of uncertainty or nothingness" (Roi, 2014:330). In the minds of the community, eliminating Antjie and queer figures through a violent spectacle is to eliminate the so-called threat their ambiguous existence poses, yet "the whole performance of beating up the accused is curing the community by *taking away the attention from the very emergence of witchcraft in a space beyond the living*, and thereby efficiently closing that crack in the membrane between worlds that witchcraft [and thus queerness] articulates" (Roi, 2014:335, my emphasis). Eliminating us attempts to hide our in-betweenness in an effort to close off the possibility of a continuation between the realms of the known and the unknown, the knowable and the unknowable. As Roi (2014:337) notes, "the witch trail re-establishes the tenuous

***5 Spilling into, spilling out**

When a Queer person tells their loved ones that they are Queer, it is often called 'coming out'. This is an interesting turn of phrase. It signals that the person is coming out from somewhere which implies that the queer parts of ourselves were hidden until that point. Thus, what was once unknown to those around us is now made known, even while it remains unknowable. What is unknown is spilling into what is known, the unknown is spilling out.

Even while we have revealed the queer parts of ourselves, we can never express our queerness fully to our heteronormative loved ones. Some parts must remain hidden. Our heteronormative loved ones may thus never fully know the queer parts of us. These are unknowable to them. The unknowable is spilling into the knowable, the unknowable is spilling out.

The person who we were perceived to be is the person who is familiar to our loved ones but once we reveal the parts of ourselves that were hidden, we become somewhat unfamiliar, even while being somewhat familiar. The unfamiliar is spilling into the familiar, the unfamiliar is spilling out.

The moment of 'coming out' is also a coming out of the proverbial closet, a dark place where monsters hide, a place where secrets are kept, secrets commonly called 'skeletons'. Whose skeletons are these? Are these skeletons of the dead, or skeletons of the (un)dead, those present absent beings, or are these bones with which we heap up the night? Closets are also portals to magical worlds, like in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. In this magical world, some animals can talk, mythical beasts abound, and magic is common. That queer people can come out of this magical world affirms that we are part of that world and the world into which we are coming out. We are in-between these worlds. The magical is spilling into the ordinary. Spilling out from the closet built by man that attempts to contain it but cannot.

separateness of realms". Even the retellings of Antjie's story that frame Antjie as a criminal and paedophile serve as an attempt to re-establish this tenuous separateness by marking and categorising and thus attempting to erase Antjie's ambiguity. If Antjie is definitely and definitively a renegade thief, or a monstrous paedophile, for example, they can be prosecuted for their crime, and their in-betweenness and queerness can be contained, hidden, locked away, and rendered of no consequence.

The persistence of the manner in which Antjie is framed equally reflects the views that many South African people continue to hold about queer figures as freakish monsters. And it is these views that undergird the apathy that exists regarding violence against queer people in South Africa. Indeed, despite many South Africans being aware of the gruesome attacks on queer people, very little is done to protect queer humxns or change the view that many South Africans hold of queer humxns. Laws set up to protect queer humxns (among them, Queer people and people suspected of witchcraft), are not properly implemented by police because many of the people in the police force hold these same views. For instance, Lee (2016:409) writes that "the police officers responsible for witchcraft cases do not take any positive action… [T]he suspected person is assaulted and their valued property is destroyed by perpetrators." He continues, "the police do not really play any pivotal role to help. They are just like community members since some of them take sides and also help to attack suspected witches" (2016:409). Similarly Ingrid Lynch and Nadia Sanger (2016:43) note the following discrimination against queer people within the South African Police Force:

> Echoing international research findings, intolerance, stereotyping, and discrimination [of queer people] are rife within community-based police services meant to protect citizens from violence, and health systems meant to provide care for community members. Attempts to report violence by a woman partner, as revealed in international research are at times met with disbelief, a lack of understanding, and ridicule, minimising violence in general, and violence between women, in particular.

In much the same way, the onlookers and spectators of Antjie's attacks did little to intervene and protect them. The collective

Tanyaradzwa: One night when I was walking home from the square a couple of white girls threw eggs at me from the apartment building, they didn't realise I live in the same apartment because they probably thought I was just walking by. So, they said "they thought it was a car" I told them they have to come out and they were like "no they're not gonna come out, they thought it was a car." They threw eggs at me three times and they "thought it was a car" but it was for me. It came as a bit of shock at first because I knew Stellenbosch was racist but it had never been outright racist... I called a police officer that was right across the street. Then he said "well it's in the apartment building, I have no jurisdiction there so" uhm I thought you had jurisdiction in South Africa.

disregard for the violence queer figures face serves as its own form of continued group prosecution of queer humxns and often the only people advocating for an end to such violence are other queer humxns, who themselves are vulnerable to violence.

Hunted down, queer humxns are and made into sacrifices at the altar of normativity, classified, grouped and categorised as means to make us disappear. Hunting in its various forms involves destruction and killing. A vixen killed by a hunter will not bear anymore kits, a bird killed by a hunter will not lay anymore eggs; both will be named, specified according to species and become trophies for the hunter, odes to his violent skill, markings in his books of 'knowledge about the world'. But what he gains from this preying, this taming, kills the story of who he is hunting and tries to contain their excess because a person's categorisation according to their deviance from a norm does not tell their story but rather patriarchy's story about them. In presenting this as their only story, their own story is killed in the man's writing, and presented only in terms of a display of the man's 'benevolence' toward them. Indeed, classifying and hunting Antjie as only a thief, paedophile, monster, freak, as Afrikaans people have done so often, tries to contain their excess, erases their story of being in-between and erases the possibility of reading what they might mean for the queer figure of the present and the present to come, the present as it is coming into being.

3. **Nou weet ek net jy sal my steeds gevange hou. Want wie is jy? En waarom soek ek so na jou? Now I know, only you will keep me captive(ated). Who are you? And why do I search for you?[44]: Listening for Antjie's in-between language and/of storytelling**.

They tried to lay Antjie's ghost but s/he leapt away from them and took her house to the foothills of Table Mountain. In the day, a mist lingers on the gallows that the sun cannot pierce. And at the first stroke of darkness s/he begs young men for a lift.

"The silencing or even the killing" of Antjie and other queer figures "carries forth its own *imperfect* solution to an unbearable problem: the problem that forces beyond control [exist] in the midst of one's social relations" (Roi, 2014:334, my emphasis). And precisely because these forces are beyond control, they cannot be erased, silenced or tamed by those to whom they pose a problem. For instance, one of the many ways in which Queer people are marginalised is through the gaze which heteronormative society places on us (see ***3**

[44] This title is taken from Koos du Plessis' *Dwaalspoor* that appears in *Erfdeel* (2016:48).

Spectators). This gaze fetishizes, ridicules, and dilutes our queerness as *only* a spectacle for the entertainment of heteronormative people. However, some Queer people choose to reclaim the space in which we are gazed upon in the form of Pride marches and the more recent popularising of drag in the reality TV show *RuPaul's Drag Race,* among others. In both these examples, the excess and flamboyance for which queer humxns are often ridiculed is celebrated and made into a spectacle *on our own terms* in such a way that is in many ways irreverent of heteronormativity. A noteworthy South African photography series *Face and Phases*, by Zanele Muholi, shows many faces of black lesbian South Africans away from the piercing gaze of heteronormativity. Sometimes the womxn are gazing back at the camera; sometimes the women are shown loving each other without the attributed shame of being perverted and deformed by defiling gaze of the normative, (re)claiming spaces for each other to exist (see Van der Vlies, 2012). Another example of this is Abri de Swart's *Ridder Thirst,* a series that collages the historiographies of Queer youth in the context of Stellenbosch University. De Swart describes this research making as integrating histories that are "closer to the skin and intimacy… introducing a body that is otherwise occluded from that site" (Hart, 2018). Similarly, the work of transgender photographer, Robert Hamblin, titled *InterSexions*, shows transgender sex workers in a playful dance with their viewers inverting the narrative of transgender sex workers as freakish and diseased (see Hamblin, 2017). These acts of reclamation use creative and subversive means to invert the gaze heteronormativity places on us and celebrates our queerness claiming a different kind of space in the narratives about us[45]. In a similarly subversive manner, the story of Antjie continues to circulate, like the story of the travellers, through rumours about them, the very same means that their community used to isolate and attempt to erase them. Antjie's in-betweenness and ambiguity continues to haunt Afrikaans homes, queerly keeping Antjie alive and present in their absence, but always uncannily absent and escaping fixed categorical presence. Thus, Antjie and their story points to the manner in which queer humxns figure "the impossibility of mastering, through knowledge or action, the past or the present" (Freccero, 2013:337). What I am therefore interested in is how Antjie's in-betweenness guides me in the present as it comes into being because "she who works at un-learning the dominant language… [she] also has to learn how to un-write and write anew" (Minh-ha, 1989:148).

On the tongues of people, Antjie's story becomes as they become, and Antjie becomes as their story becomes. Antjie and their story, like other queer figures, is (in) all-ways already there

[45] For another example of this reclamation in the context of fashion design, see Martelle Ludik's A/W17 series.

and paradoxically still not quite there yet. Their "sense of the story overflows the boundaries of patriarchal time and truth. It overflows the notion of story as finished product ('just a story') - one neatly wrapped, that rounds off with a normative finale and 'leaves the mind at rest.'" (Minh-ha, 1989:149-150). Indeed, as Antjie has no clear origin, so the story has no clear origin. As Antjie was whispered about, so their story is whispered. As Antjie haunts, so their story haunts too. As Antjie is (said to be able) to move around here, there, and elsewhere, so too their story moves around, here, there, and elsewhere. As Antjie transgresses time and space, so their story transgresses time and space. As Antjie is (said to be) ever-changing, so too their story is ever-changing. Equally, despite being murdered countless times, Antjie continues to be alive, with, through and because of their story. Because their story (queerly) moves around without a singular physical body, with and through so many physical bodies, Antjie can (continue to) move around without a singular physical body, with and through so many bodies. Because the story is ever-changing and ambiguous, Antjie can (continue to) be ever-changing and ambiguous. Thus, both Antjie and their story's excess (fluidity, multiplicity, ambiguity) lend themselves and their queer forms to each other. The one allows the other to continue existing.

Furthermore, Antjie's excess (fluidity, multiplicity, ambiguity) necessarily (be)comes with and through bodies. Becoming in, on, with and through the mouths of the people, Antjie('s story) "depends upon every one of us to come into being. [S/he] needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating *what we have heard together* to keep on coming into being" (Minh-ha, 1989: 119, my emphasis). What we have heard in turn sprouts from Antjie's haunting. In a queer dance, the (telling of the) story (be)comes with Antjie who (be)comes with the (telling of the) story that (be)comes with our remembering (bodies) that (be)comes with the haunting that (be)comes with Antjie. And these (have always) necessarily dance(d) in this (inseparable) way outside of linear time, for they "are fragments of/in life, fragments that never stop interacting while being complete in themselves" (Minh-ha, 1989:142). The (re)membering, understanding, and creating (from the fragments and the whole) of Antjie seem to take the same queer in-between form as Antjie. Therefore, as I see it, as I hear it, the story of Antjie and other queer figures points to the possibility of a language and/of story-telling that queerly becomes in-between categories and master narratives, and thus, like Antjie and other queer figures, it is a "radical calling into question, in every undertaking, of everything that one tends to take for granted" (Minh-ha, 1989:40). I revel in the irreverence of this transgression that does not ask permission.

Furthermore, precisely because this language and/of storytelling radically transgresses categorical thinking and exists without a beginning or end, it offers an open space that is endlessly fruitful. Minh-ha (2016:70) writes of this middleness, this in-between as follows:

> Middleness in this context does not refer to a static centre, nor does it imply any compromise or lack of determination. A median position, on the contrary, is where extremes lose their power; where all directions are (still) possible; and hence, where one can assume with intensity one's freedom of movement. As such, it is a place of decentralization that gives in to neither side, takes into its realm the vibrations of both, requiring thereby constant acknowledgement of and transformation in shifting conditions.

What this says to me is that this language and/of storytelling, because of its middleness, can move with queer bodies, become with queer bodies, as Antjie becomes with the tongues(bodies) of those that speak of them, and "the entire being is engaged in the act of speaking-listening-weaving-procreating" (Minh-ha, 1989:127). This is a language and/of storytelling that is more sensitive and attentive to the nuances of that (queer) experience than conventionalised narrative practice, that moves with the fluidity and queerness of experience, that pauses to breathe (quietly/raggedly) when necessary, and is silent when silence is the only apt response. Like fog that so often signals the uncanny, the shifting from what is familiar to what is strange, this becoming language signals a moving from formlessness to form, where the old figures are fading and the new figures begin to take shape, and yet it also retains a necessary formlessness, rather than settling into received formal patterns and categories.

Antjie's is a language and/of storytelling that is explicable in relation to what Minh-ha (2016:72) terms "a phase of (r)evolution". Through this language, "reality is set into motion as it travels between countries of light and of night, and shifts its boundaries as it moves from one marking, one territory, one light to another… here, ambiguity offers a site where [the body] continues to resist hierarchized and linear categories" (Minh-ha, 2016:65). Because it is embodied, this is a language that pauses to take the time it needs to think about, feel about, listen about what it wants to say for this language is (also) unsure, stutters and breaks. This allows space for fragmentation, for breaking with words that no longer suffice and allowing for the (re)growth of words that work better. This language and/of story-telling, "as a voice fashioned out of shining darkness… tells you. You don't tell it…The [story] tells you how to arrange the words and the arrangement of the words tells you, or tells me, what's going on in the story" (Minh-ha, 1989:35-36). Like divination, this language can draw "a meaningful universe from an assemblage that emerges out of that very significant sphere that is not-here

and not-now" (Roi, 2014:331). Antjie's is a language and/of storytelling that is "accurate because it is at once extremely flexible and rigid, not because it wishes to stick to certain rules of correctness for reasons of mere conservatism... It is accurate because it partakes in the setting into motion of forces that lie dormant in us" (Minh-ha, 1989:148). I eagerly wait, listening in the interstice to hear what may emerge from this language and/of storytelling, what it will stir in me, for it is "the story of a people. Of us, peoples. Story, history, literature (or religion, philosophy, natural science, ethics) all in one" (Minh-ha, 1989:119). It seems that this language and/of storytelling requires only that we listen and see as continually as the stories become. (See **Met die Helm Gebore** for an exploration of what this listening and seeing might entail and how this language and/of storytelling might be possible).

F.

Meandering: far away (,) from home[46]

When we met, I wrote to you about my various encounters and dissatisfactions with the writing that exists about queer humxns and the failures of archiving queer lives. I also wrote to you about a previous project in which I had made the same mistakes that I was so dissatisfied with. Following from this, I wrote you about the ways in which I intended to fix these mistakes. I outlined the hopes and intentions I had for writing a new project that would do justice to the Queer womxn in my first project and how, this time around, I would consider myself more intentionally and critically. Then, I wrote to you about how I intended to do this. It went something like "the writer can't determine the meaning of her own text" and an explanation of my understanding of fictocriticism.

At the core of what I wrote to you was an urgent need to find a new way to listen to and see (queer and Queer) stories that live on the margins, and the in-between. What I could never have predicted was that the very limb I hoped to use to listen, see, and write this project would be torn from me and along with it my archive of recordings of the stories of the queer womxn I interviewed. The materials from which I had hoped to stitch together a new project were gone. They are still gone. And I am still left with a phantom limb that continues to haunt me. My embodiment. My imagination. What I was left with, too, was myself, in that room of loss, its walls covered in mirrors. I sat in that room for days, weeks; scratching patches in my scalp, chewing the skin around my nails, and pacing, eyes to the floor, until my feet were worn flat. Threadbare, desperate and searching, I finally looked up into those mirrors. I saw, at first, only myself. I looked again: and what I saw there, in the seams of my skin, in the curl in my fringe, in the curve of my nose was my mother and my father, my grandmother and grandfather, and their mothers and fathers, and theirs before that. When I saw them there, I realised.

The urgency I'd had was never really to tell other people's stories but rather to find some version of my own story and some way to tell it, what it looked like, and where it would lead me. What I also saw in that mirrored room of trapped self was that I was never alone. Beside me were other writers, artists, and thinkers who were searching for their own stories too. And it was there, alone together with all those who came before me, and all those whose lives and work haunt beside and inside me, that my project began to take its shape. The writing began to

[46] This title is inspired by Trinh T. Minh-ha's (2016) "Far Away, From Home: The Comma Between" in her *Elsewhere, within Here.*

lead me, instead of me leading it. And so I had to listen and to look; to intuit new ways of storying process.

One of the first questions asked of me by a beloved friend and fellow writer was "What is your culture? What is your story?" I answered: I believe I have no culture, no story. Yet my ears rang, and inside me my ancestors needled: "What about us?" At first, I chose not to listen and to block my ears. I looked away, I hid, and I ignored them. But the question continued to ring and rush, its persistent sounds unanswered: "What about us?" "What about us?" *What about you?* I dismissed. And yet it was only through allowing their voices to sweep through me that I could unblock the rivers between me and my story, a powerful flow of current that, in many ways, *I* had staunched, stagnated.

The question and response haunted me like that phantom limb. A missing branch. A raft swirling out of touch. Because for a long time, I thought I was ashamed of and disgusted by some parts of my story and the stories of my people, especially those parts that related to my whiteness, and specifically my white Afrikanerness. This was because those parts of my story involved the violence and oppression that were historically enacted by my people, and which often continued into the present. How could I accommodate such a forceful ghost? But seeing, in my own image, those Afrikaner womxn and men who are my lineage, I realised that I was also ashamed and disgusted by myself; my complicity in the culture's oppression and violence. So more often than not, I chose to walk away and distance myself. This created a barrier not only of protection, but also of loss, for as a result, I was distancing myself from the *shame* of my story and therefore also from the possibilities of the joy, nuance and responsibility that came with that story. At first, I kept up my refusal to countenance my 'others'.

But when I had no more of other people's stories to tell and I was left with the questions – "What is you culture? What is your story?" "What about us?" – I had to listen more closely. It was Gert Vlok Nel singing "Gert bo die grond roep na Koos onder die grond, kom in Koos, kom in, kom in" [Gert above the ground calls to Koos underground, come in Koos, come in, come in] that first gave me guidance. A singing voice projected like an alluring ghost into the room, sounds surrounding me, entering my body. A song inviting connection and welcome, linking above and below, this life and another, the living and the missing… So I too called to Koos du Plessis, who himself so often searched for all "skimme gewikkel in jasse… op reis van perron na perron, in 'n middernagland sonder grense of tyd" [phantoms wrapped in coats… travelling from platform to platform in a midnight world with no boundaries or time]. And with

his guidance I called to my own shadows and ghosts. And when I made a space of invitation where once I had refused, in came the ghosts of the travellers walking hand in hand with Aunty Janet, who so long ago had told me the story of Boontjieskraal. Cross-legged, I sat down at their feet to listen for their story (again). What I heard from them, I told to you and through listening to them, seeing them, and telling you their story, I began to piece together parts of my own story.

The travellers' ever-elusive story and curse, their present absence and absent presence in the lives of the De Wet family, led me to question (my own) (q/Queer) archives and the pitfalls and holes in attempts at archiving. Their queer disruption of the De Wet's lineage lead me to questions about queerness beyond Queerness, and how the term can be expanded and applied in a broader sense to think through those figures, like themselves, operating from the margins that disrupt the centre. And they took me to Boontjieskraal. There, on the De Wet's front stoep, I learnt about the(ir) story of Afrikaner-gasvryheid, its boundaries and shapes, and what these included and excluded. As we sat together, bodies lowered into our hips, the haunting (story) seemed to elide and blur these categories which before attempted to exclude them. These were the first of my ghosts I encountered, and I often found myself shifting uncomfortably.

I met the De Wet family and my own family (on a trip to Namibia) too. First I met with Pieter, in whose eyes I saw the (often) unacknowledged fear many Afrikaners have of our culture's inherently queer ambivalence. I followed the path of that fear as it spread up behind his eyes and took root in his skull and along the way I found fragments of the Afrikaner's queer story. But Pieter often averted his gaze from me and struggled to look me in the eyes. In Namibia with my family, amongst pairs of broad khaki shoulders standing around a braai fire, amongst doilies, tea cozies, and walls decorated with texts that read "Live, Love, Laugh" or quoted Bible verses, and seated at the Sunday lunch table, I met young married Afrikaner womxn and men in whom I saw many similarities to the De Wet family.

Then I met Mrs De Wet, in whom I saw a volksmoeder. She wore a bonnet tied at her chin and a now yellowed, moth-eaten apron that may once have been white. Together, we made koeksisters in her kitchen. In the lines on her hands, the way she folded the dough and stitched into her hem, I saw strands of the complex web of the Afrikaner womxn's role in Afrikaner-gasvryheid. Mrs De Wet's story and the volksmoeder story, sewn together with the stories of Afrikaner womxn writers, helped me to (begin) understand(ing) the Afrikaner womxn's (ongoing) complicity in the building and shaping of the very same Afrikaner Nationalism that

aims to keep her neatly in her place. Seated with us were the womxn who came before me, some of whom so often toed the lines of the roles they had been given and simultaneously the roles that they had taken. Like the dough we kneaded, shaped and twisted, they were always negotiating their confines (both the given and taken).

Along the first path I took –- with its many detours, digression, sidetracks, and trails – I met many in whose homes and presences (absences) I felt (un)welcome. The travelling family, the De Wet family, my own family, the young Afrikaner families, each of these led me to questions about the politics of gasvryheid. All the traces and fragments of the story of Afrikaner-gasvryheid that I had found along the way had often left my hands and my ears cold but a question remained, clinging to the tip of my tongue: "Is the rotten odour of Afrikaner-gasvryheid all there is to gasvryheid?" I found myself wandering back to that room with its walls covered in mirrors. There I looked for a quiet corner. For weeks, I sat there wrapped in a quilted blanket wondering if it would be possible to revisit gasvryheid. Is it possible, somewhere, somehow, to find a gasvryheid that is not figured in those exclusionary and contractual vocabularies of Afrikaner-gasvryheid? You appeared beside me, tapped me on the shoulder and gestured for me to come with you. And in the middle of that room, in-between each of our paths, a room that Gloria Anzaldua and Adela Licona would call a (b)orderland, what I might call a stoep, we sat together with writers, friends, and artists and we each shared morsels of our food, our stories, our work, our silence. It was here that I saw a gasvryheid that reconfigured old social codes and disrupted their logics. It was a gasvryheid that did not ask "Who are you?" out of judgment or a need to categorise. It was rather a radical, affective gasvryheid that revels in the curiosity of hearing and telling stories, and delights in sharing stories towards mutual meaning making. And it was a gasvryheid that considered and respected the vulnerability that came with sharing. Sometimes listening, sometimes speaking, sometimes alone with my thoughts, I knew that it would be from this gasvryheid relationality, here in the in-between, that I would share my stories. But I still felt unsure about how I would find my stories, how I would learn to listen in the in-between and, then, how I would tell these stories.

My mother and my father called me to sit beside them for a while to tell me about the day I was born. In my neck, I could feel the breath of our familiar ghosts as they gathered around us (some of these we inherited, some of these we collected after we were born). Sometimes I could faintly hear the ghosts calling me but I did not know where I stood, never mind where to go. I wanted to follow them but they were fading in and out of focus. I lay my head on my mother's shoulder and asked, "How can I see them? Where do I find ears for those things on the other

side of speech?" But she said nothing; just started stroking my then sanguine hair. As I lay against my mother, on the other side of the mirror on the wall across from me, I saw a man bent crooked by his years. Ta Vuurmaak. There were children sitting with him and he was telling them about being born met die helm. He said that people who were born met die helm could speak to ghosts and the spirits of those that had passed on. I wanted to sit at his feet for a while and learn about die helm but I was afraid I would disturb his peace, and also that he would disturb mine. I was curious about this helm phenomenon he spoke about, so later I pored over old books about Afrikaans people. But I found only mentions here and traces there. From playground rumours and neighbourhood stories told over tea and mosbolletjies, I knew that many Afrikaans people believed in the spiritual powers of the caul. It was on the pages of Achmat Dangor's *Waiting for Leila* that I met Samad, a man that was gebore met die helm. From him I learnt what it meant for a coloured person to be born with die helm. He communed with the spirits of his ancestors, came face-to-face with his ghosts and saw the world through "a different door, the door of the uncanny, the door of the fragment, the door of the shocking parallel" (Gordon, 2008:66). But I knew that some of those whom I call my ancestors were responsible for disappearing his, and that the ghosts we had to face would not be the same. So I turned to the ghostly shelves of my childhood to learn more about what it meant for a white Afrikaans person to be born met die helm. It is here that I met the McDonalds from Toorwater in Chris Barnard's *Paljas.* They lived an isolated life far removed from the community and the threads holding the family together were wearing thin. I was particularly curious about Willem McDonald, the queer young boy who did not speak. His father mentioned that he may have been born met die helm so I followed Willem as he became friends with Manuel the clown, who, it seemed, only he could see. I watched how Willem was shunned by other children for not speaking. When the clown revealed himself to the community members, I watched as they shunned him and called him satanic, as I and many other queer people have been shunned for our queerness. I also watched as Willem and Manuel played together and in their magical imaginative world, I watched as Willem transformed and began to speak. And I wondered if it was because Willem may have been born met die helm that he could follow Manuel and access the clown's world of stories and play. Or even, perhaps, if the receptivity to *play* is itself a passage towards change and connection. For in play he learnt an affective language to say those things that before may have been unsayable. Soon, Willem's transformation also began healing his family and community.

On Samad's and Willem's paths I learnt that those who are born met die helm could access places, spaces, and spirits that lie on the other side of speech, on the other side of sight. From them I discovered that those gebore met die helm are more receptive to haunting and to in-between beings whom I had been trained not to see. I was not gebore met die helm but I yearned to have these same abilities and give my ghosts some form of a gasvrye accommodation. I went back to that mirrored room, running this time, eager to find a path that might lead me to a place where I could find my helm. I found my mother and father there again and asked them: "Where is my helm?" They said No, this time I was looking for the wrong thing, in the wrong place. They told me to remember the stories they had told me, the stories they had heard from my grandparents, and theirs before that. They advised me to keep looking in the mirrors that surrounded me with many selves. Then I reflected, and I stitched what they said to the writing of those who are also thinking about the value of storytelling and found that stories are how people narrated their understanding of the world, and that it is through the stories told about haunting, that ghosts are also kept alive, much like the travelling family and the curse of Boontjieskraal remain present in their absence through the stories that people tell about them. It is thus through returning to the stories of my people that I might be able draw die helm over my eyes. Through hearing and (re)telling the stories of my people, I might be able to see, hear and face my ghosts, and in so doing understand myself as a Queer Afrikaner womxn a bit better. But I was still searching for a language of storytelling in which to tell my stories, a language that would move with the in-betweenness and queerness of these stories.

I went to sit by the window for a while, to drink a cup of tea. Just below the windowsill, in a patch of sunlight, an old womxn was carefully taking her skin out of folds of oily newspaper to drape herself onto her bones. An old man came into the room to hammer a penny to a doorframe. I turned my head to look at him but slowly the room began to fill with ochre smoke until I could no longer see and the air was swelling with a persistent whisper. Antjie Somers! It was the Queer witch Antjie Somers coming to take my hand, and lead me down the roads where they walk. I remembered them well from childhood stories and I remember the wind with which they used to blow into town. They showed me their days of being a fisherman and a hangman; they showed me the choirs of people who shunned them and led me past all the homes of Afrikaans families that called them a thief. All the while their face and body changed, shifted, and morphed. Together we walked with many queer figures such as witches and Queer people from all over the world. Walking with them, I saw how Queer people and witches shared many similarities in how we are treated for our ambiguities, and the manner in which we

queer(y) binary logics and societal norms. I saw that often the motivations that drove our persecution(s) were the threat that our queer existences posed to the entrenched notions and categories that undergird systems of power.

Along the roads we walked, we also saw many queer figures that reclaimed the narratives that were told about queer figures and inverted the normative gaze placed upon us. These stories and Antjie's own persistent and continuous (re)turn, their excess and in-betweeness, guided me to un-write and write anew in a language of storytelling that, like Antjie, becomes in the in-between. I felt this language take shape from within my body as I drew meaning from the assemblages of fragments that emerged from all those places on the other side of the mirror, places that were not-here and not-now, those places that live in the interstice. What was strange about the sensation of the language swelling under my skin was its familiarity, as if it had been there all along, long before me, and that it would be there long after me. It was as if I was stepping into a river that ran deep and wide and into the ocean with no beginning or end in sight, that "travels between countries of light and of night, and shifts its boundaries as it moves from one marking, one territory, one light to another" (Minh-ha, 2016:65). This is a language that transgresses categorical thinking and revels in this transgression, a language that moves with and adapts to queerness, and that is sensitive and attentive to the nuances of that experience. I knew that this would be the language I would use to tell my stories.

Now, I am writing to you from a different place where it rains all night long and the evenings are buried deep in October. In this place, my shadow falls on a different side, and the trains shunt past stations built from words that seem so far away from home. This foreign city brims over its edges and in its restless streets many of my childhood dreams come to play and bloom. But here, I'm also scared that the travelling family, Samad, Willem, Antjie, Gert, Koos, you, and all those dear friends, family, writers, and artists who stand waving at me are waving goodbye. So I hesitate to write, and sometimes I even look away to try to keep your faces framed in my mind. But when I turn to wave back and say "Please, do not forget me here", you all smile and say that this is not the end and that in each of you, you carry a part of me, and I of you. And through the city lights that splinter in the cracks of each sleeted night I often see your faces and my own, hear our whispers that say "keep looking, there's always more to hear."

These are the paths I have walked, and am walking still. I do not know where yours have led you but one day soon, we will find each other again at a bench under a tree or perhaps at a pond in which we can watch our reflection ripple as we skim rocks on its mirrored face.

G.

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